

Chapter IX – B. National Forests

The greatest wonder is that we can see these trees and not wonder more. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

The United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service administers the 1.8 million-acre George Washington and Jefferson National Forest in Virginia. This National Forest constitutes nearly 50 percent of the public outdoor recreation land in the Commonwealth. The Forest stretches the length of the western portion of the state and has acreage in 31 western counties.

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Findings

- The National Forests are managed for multiple uses and sustained yield. This means that all approved uses will be accommodated to the capacity of the land to support these uses without degradation.
- Recreation use on the George Washington – Jefferson National Forest for calendar year 2000 was estimated at 2.97 million visits. A national survey of recreation use is being conducted on the GW-Jeff in 2006.
- The 1.8 million-acre National Forest is the primary provider of dispersed recreation opportunity in Virginia.
- The 17 designated wilderness areas on the George Washington – Jefferson National Forest provide the majority of wilderness opportunities in the state.
- The National Forest provides the only publicly managed motorized trails in Virginia.
- The George Washington – Jefferson National Forest provides comprehensive equestrian trail systems with campgrounds, a range of trail types and lengths, and support facilities for horse riders.

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Recommendations

- The U. S. Forest Service should:
- Continue to develop new partnerships to market recreational opportunities and rural economic development through tourism; work with the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia's Blue Ridge Highlands Tourism, Inc., Shenandoah Valley Tourism Association, and the Virginia Tourism Corporation to develop regional and international marketing strategies to showcase Virginia's outdoor recreation opportunities.

- Forests should retain manageable size parcels to avoid fragmentation.
- Continue to place program emphasis on areas designated by Congress such as the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, Mount Pleasant Scenic Area, and Wilderness Areas.
- Identify opportunities to exchange land that consolidates public ownership; and enhance access to the land and water resources of national forest lands.
- Study the potential for National Forest Scenic Byways to become part of the Virginia Byways system. The U. S. Forest Service should work cooperatively with local communities, the Virginia Departments of Transportation, Historic Resources and Conservation and Recreation to develop Virginia Byways that have historic, cultural, scenic and recreational themes
- Continue partnerships with the Department of Historic Resources to enhance the preservation of historic and cultural sites; interpretation of cultural, historic and natural resources; and exchanging cultural resource information with the State Historic Preservation Officer.
- Survey and protect natural heritage resources on national forest lands.
- Continue to plan for and develop outdoor recreational facilities compatible with National Forest objectives and that meet needs identified in the Virginia Outdoors Plan.
- Facilitate the activities of guide services and outfitters who provide equipment and access to the backcountry areas of National Forests for persons who lack the gear, time or skills to access these areas on their own and incorporate education for backcountry skills.
- The George Washington – Jefferson National Forest should continue to work with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to transfer management of New River Campground adjacent to the New River Trail State Park.

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The USDA-Forest Service is the largest federal supplier of outdoor recreation in the nation. Recreation use on the George Washington – Jefferson National Forest for calendar year 2000 was estimated at 2.97 million visits. The Forest Service has a strong commitment to meeting the recreation needs of forest users and they have intensified their management of outdoor recreational areas in an effort to increase the carrying capacity while protecting the resource. A focal point for outdoor recreation, the national forest lands are vital to satisfying the increasing demand for dispersed natural resource-based recreation opportunities. The Forests also provide

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spectacular upland scenery, unique ecosystems, trails and many other nature-based recreation opportunities. A comprehensive forest roads system, the Blue Ridge Parkway and 2,000 miles of trails, including the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, facilitate easy access. The proximity of large urban areas promotes high volume urban escapes, and the more rural lands are the backyard playgrounds and tourism attractions for many smaller communities.

National forests differ from national parks and other federal lands in their management concept. The multiple-use sustained yield concept ensures the continued provision of forage, recreation, timber, water, wilderness and wildlife resources needed by this and future generations. Although the opportunities for outdoor recreation are extensive and the public demand for these opportunities is seemingly endless, the Forests' capability to meet these demands is neither static nor endless. Visitor preferences can shift over time, and both changing financial limitations and environmental impacts must be considered. The recreation management objective of the U. S. Forest Service is to enhance public use and enjoyment of its land. National Forest wilderness areas provide unique primitive recreation experiences. Congressionally designated, these areas optimize the natural processes of the ecosystem with generally minimal human activity. There are 17 designated wilderness areas in Virginia's national forests. More than 18 other areas have been inventoried as having potential for designation as wilderness areas or as additions to existing designated wilderness areas. Two of these areas, The Priest and Three Ridges were designated as Wilderness areas in 2000. The George Washington-Jefferson National Forest is the largest supplier of primitive, backcountry recreational opportunities in Virginia. The designated wilderness areas ensure that these opportunities will be available for future generations.

In southwestern Virginia, the natural resources, especially national forests are major recreational destinations. The New River Recreation Area, adjacent to the New River in Carroll County, contains a campground and picnic area that complements the New River Trail State Park. This facility allows visitors direct access to the state park and to the river for hiking, bicycling, walking, fishing, tubing and boating. This facility also anchors the eastern end of the Virginia Highlands Horse Trail. Other significant recreation areas include the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, and the Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area.

The National Forest in Virginia is divided into several ranger districts to help distribute management resources throughout the Forest. Each Ranger District offers its own unique variety of special places, recreational resources, scenic areas, and outstanding trails. A description of these resources is available for each Ranger District on the Forest's web site. An abbreviated example for one district follows.

Glenwood-Pedlar Ranger Districts

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/gp/index.shtml>

Situated in the picturesque Blue Ridge Mountains, the Glenwood & Pedlar Ranger Districts stretch over 223,000 acres from just south of Waynesboro, VA to just north of Troutville, VA. Recreation opportunities abound for visitors, ranging from a short day hike along a shaded

stream to a week-long backpacking trip up and down rugged mountain trails. There are over 300 miles of hiking trails, including approximately 120 miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The 65-mile Glenwood Horse Trail provides a variety of experiences for the horse enthusiasts, while the South Pedlar ATV Trail System is available to those wanting to ride their ATV's and dirt bikes.

Camping is available in the area as well as the opportunity to explore five wildernesses, St. Mary's, The Priest, Three Ridges, James River Face and Thunder Ridge. Also included in this district area is the Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area.

SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREAS

The National Forest also contains many special areas that have their own enabling legislation and special management direction. Examples of two of these follow.

Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area

http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/gp/recreation/trails/hiking/mt_pleasant/index.shtml

The Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area is located in the USFS Glenwood & Pedlar Ranger Districts. The area was established in the US Code under Title 16, Chapter 2, Subchapter II §545a. The 7,580-acre scenic area was established in 1994 within the George Washington National Forest. The Secretary of Agriculture administers the scenic area. As part of this designation, a management plan was developed for the area restricting new permanent roads and timber harvesting within the scenic area, except as necessary for control of fire, insects and diseases. Motorized travel is allowed on State Route 635 and on Forest Development Road 51. All other motorized travel is not permitted within the scenic area.

Mount Rogers National Recreation Area

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/mr/>

The Mount Rogers National Recreation Area (NRA) was established by Congress to help bring eco-tourism benefits to an economically depressed region of the state. Located near the Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee state line intersection, the NRA's developed campgrounds, extensive trail system, variety of recreation settings, and spectacular scenery attracts visitors from throughout the country. These visitors have contributed significantly to the economy of the region. As an example, the Virginia Creeper Trail, 16 miles of which lie within the NRA, has been a significant economic generator for the Town of Damascus which lies on the southern end of the Mount Rogers NRA.

Horseback riding in Mount Rogers' Crest Zone is rapidly out-pacing the carrying capacity of the trails and the fragile alpine ecosystem. The U. S. Forest Service conducted a 'Limits of Acceptable Change' analysis of the crest zone to determine the best combination of management actions to accommodate appropriate levels of recreational use and to protect the resource. Some actions that have been undertaken to provide alternatives to trail riding in the crest zone are the extension of the Virginia Highlands Horse Trail to the New River Trail State Park and the ongoing development of the East End Horse Trail complex that contains several campsites and staging areas.

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Mount Rogers has the potential to be an even greater recreation magnet for the eastern United States. Unfortunately, because of limited funding it has never achieved its potential as envisioned by the enabling legislation. The Mount Rogers National Recreation Area Plan envisions a wide range of facilities designed to meet the expectations of all visitors from primitive to highly developed resort-type facilities.

Chapter IX. – A – 3. National Wildlife Refuges and Fish Hatcheries

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) manages 15 National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) and one national fish hatchery in Virginia comprising more than 161,032 acres. The refuges are managed primarily to provide habitat and to protect valuable ecosystems; however, they also provide significant outdoor recreational opportunities. Some of the refuges are grouped together into complexes with one project leader managing two or more refuges. The following discussion provides additional information about the role of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in meeting Virginia's outdoor recreation and open space needs.

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Findings

- The NWR System Improvement Act of 1997 provides guidance for management and public use of the refuge system and requires each refuge in the system to prepare a comprehensive conservation plan by 2012.
- A key provision of the act defines compatible wildlife-dependent recreation as a legitimate general public use of the system, and establishes the following activities as appropriate public uses: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation.
- The refuge system helps to fulfill the following conservation objectives:
 - to preserve, restore and enhance the natural ecosystem of all species of animals and plants, including endangered or threatened species;
 - to perpetuate migratory bird resources;
 - to preserve the natural diversity of plants and animals;
 - to provide an understanding of wildlife ecology while offering refuge visitors safe, wholesome and enjoyable recreational experiences.
- Level or declining budgets for refuges nationwide, and accompanying increases in fixed costs, have caused some refuges in Virginia to reduce recreational opportunities.

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Recommendations

The USFWS will coordinate and implement the following recommendations with regard to outdoor recreation and the NWRs.

- Continue to explore opportunities for partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others to provide compatible recreational and environmental education for Virginians.
- Evaluate significant areas where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can increase the availability of its resources for compatible recreational uses, especially those that are wildlife-dependent.
- The Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery should remain in operation and sufficient funding

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be provided in order to maintain its important function in restoring anadromous fish to the Bay and its rivers as well as provide public recreation opportunities.

- Continue maintenance of the agreement allowing access through Back Bay NWR to False Cape State Park that accommodates the wildlife resources of the refuge and park visitors.
- Continue to explore opportunities to acquire additional sites along the Potomac River to help protect eagle habitat and other natural heritage resources.
- The proposed expansion of Plum Tree Island should be evaluated to possibly include public access to Back River and Lloyd Bay for fishing and wildlife observation.
- The westward expansion of Back Bay NWR should include provisions for canoeing/kayaking and bank fishing. This may be accomplished by renovating former boat ramps and through partnerships with the Commonwealth and the City of Virginia Beach. Give high priority to the relocation of the visitor center to the western side of Back Bay to improve accessibility to the refuge for environmental education.
- Continue to work closely with National Park Service and private partners to optimize compatible recreational opportunities at Chincoteague NWR and Assateague Island National Seashore while protecting sensitive beach habitat.

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National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, signed into law October 9, 1997, provides guidance for the management and establishment of a national network of lands and waters deemed appropriate for conservation, and designed to encourage public access to the refuge system. As defined by the act, the mission of the refuge system is to *administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.*

A key provision of the act defines compatible wildlife-dependent recreation as a legitimate general public use of the refuge system. It also establishes the following six activities as appropriate: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation. The act establishes a formal process for determining compatible public use and retains refuge managers' authority to use sound professional judgement in determining whether or not that use will be permitted.

The act also requires each refuge in the system to prepare a comprehensive conservation plan within 15 years after passage of the bill and to allow for active public participation during the preparation and revision of the plan.

Conservation Objectives

The refuge system helps to fulfill the following conservation objectives: 1) to preserve, restore and enhance the natural ecosystem of all species of animals and plants, including endangered or threatened species; 2) to perpetuate migratory bird resources; 3) to preserve the natural diversity of plants and animals; and 4) to provide an understanding of wildlife ecology while offering refuge visitors safe, wholesome and enjoyable recreational experiences. Planning for priority

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public uses should be based on the capacity of an area to provide a quality experience, not its ability to accommodate quantity.

Funding

While refuges in Virginia have enormous potential to provide additional high quality wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, the federal budget for the NWR System will likely remain level, at best, over the next several years. With salaries, fuel, and other fixed costs rising, a level budget results in a decreased ability to conduct necessary wildlife and habitat management activities. Three refuges in Virginia (James River, Plum Tree Island, and Presquile) have been placed in preservation status, meaning that they will be minimally staffed and limited in the types and amounts of recreation they provide. The Service will seek to invigorate existing partnerships and develop new ones to meet the challenges created by declining budgets. However, it is certain that refuge visitors will witness some declines in the type and amount of available recreational opportunities over the next several years.

Great Dismal Swamp and Nansemond National Wildlife Refuges

The Great Dismal Swamp NWR, established 1974, lies in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. The seasonally flooded wetlands consist of over 111,200 acres. Lake Drummond, 3,100 acres and one of only two natural lakes found in Virginia, lies in the center of refuge. The refuge was established to restore and maintain the historical natural biodiversity of the Great Dismal Swamp.

Habitat management issues include restoration of the globally rare Atlantic white cedar forest and conservation and management of the water resources, vital to the native wildlife and varied plant communities of a swamp ecosystem.

A variety of wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities are available on the refuge including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, interpretation wildlife photography, and environmental education. Hiking, biking, boating, and vehicular access help to facilitate these uses. Current resources include more than 80 miles of trails for hiking and biking with most use focused at the Washington Ditch and Jericho Lanes entrances where parking is available. An auto tour to Lake Drummond is available with a special day pass from the refuge headquarters during business hours.

The refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan, to be finalized in the fall of 2006, calls for expansion of the public use program. Among other additions, a new visitor center is planned for the abandoned Highway 17 corridor in Chesapeake and a visitor services center and environmental education pavilion in Suffolk. The plan will also add an annual bear hunt to the refuge's hunting opportunities.

The Nansemond NWR, a satellite facility of the Great Dismal Swamp Refuge, is approximately 423 acres of marshland transferred from the U.S. Navy through the surplus property program. The facility is closed to public use.

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuges

In 1989, the USFWS received approval to expand the Back Bay NWR to the north and west of Sandbridge and along the western shore of Back Bay. When complete, the 6,340-acre expansion will provide additional protection for the marshes and fastlands surrounding Back Bay and help to initiate the recovery of this important resource. Acquired acreage in 2006 was 9,102 acres.

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This refuge has an extensive environmental education program that promotes an appreciation for the resource and provides some appropriate public use of these federal lands. In 2005, 4,889 school children participated in outdoor classroom activities at the refuge. After acquiring the lands from willing sellers, the USFWS will evaluate the suitability of these areas for incorporating compatible recreational opportunities. Among the facilities under consideration are water access points, fishing areas, wildlife observation decks, trails and environmental education centers.

A key issue concerning Back Bay NWR is the matter of access to False Cape State Park through the refuge. It is extremely important that the agreement be maintained which allows access to False Cape State Park to accommodate park visitors and the wildlife resources of the refuge. The final Memorandum of Understanding related to park access was finalized in the fall of 1996. Continued monitoring of that access will allow for enhanced educational and recreational opportunities at one of Virginia's most unique parks.

Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge

Mackay Island NWR is located on the north side of Currituck Sound, straddling the Virginia-North Carolina border. The refuge was established to provide wintering habitat for greater snow geese and other waterfowl, and now totals 8,024 acres. Of this, 824 acres are in Virginia. Recreational opportunities include wildlife observation, wildlife photography, deer hunting and fishing.

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge

Chincoteague NWR, one of the country's most-loved refuges, receives more than 1.4 million visits each year from people from all 50 states and numerous foreign countries. Visitors are treated to abundant bird and other wildlife, pristine beaches, accessible trails, and a variety of interpretive/educational programs. The state-of-the-art Herbert H. Bateman Educational and Administrative Center is equipped with 5000 square feet of interactive exhibits, an auditorium, classroom, and sales outlet. The Center is an exemplary building for environmentally-friendly construction. In addition, the Refuge provides opportunities for the public to enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation including hunting and fishing.

Featuring more than 14,000 acres of beach, maritime forest, and freshwater and saltwater wetlands, Chincoteague Refuge manages this unique barrier island ecosystem to allow many species of wildlife to co-exist. Originally established in 1943 for the greater snow goose, the refuge's scope of work has broadened to include the more than 320 species of birds that are known to occur on the refuge along with other native plants and animals. Several threatened and endangered species including the endangered Delmarva Peninsula fox squirrel and the threatened piping plover benefit from the refuge's management activities.

Eastern Shore of Virginia and Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuges

Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR was established in 1984 when the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service obtained the old Cape Charles Air Force Base. This 1,123-acre refuge is located at the southern tip of the Delmarva Peninsula and is a hemispherically important stopover area for migrating neo-tropical bird species. The USFWS, with its partners (the Commonwealth, local governments and the private sector) are identifying critical areas for habitat conservation in Northampton County.

The refuge has a state-of-the-art visitor center, interpretive trails that include an historic coastal artillery site, wildlife observation areas and a photography blind. There is big game hunting for deer during the Virginia archery and gun seasons. The refuge participates in a number of local festivals including the Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife Festival. The refuge has been identified as an anchor site in the *Birdwatcher's Guide to Delmarva*. It is a site for the Virginia Coastal Birding Trail, and has been designated as an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society.

Fisherman Island NWR was established in 1969 and has been managed by the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Refuge since 1984. This 1,850-acre refuge is a stopover area for neo-tropical bird species during the spring and fall migrations, and is a major nesting site for American oystercatchers, brown pelicans, and other beach nesting birds. The refuge is closed to the public due to the sensitive habitat, but guided tours are conducted during the non-nesting season.

Eastern Shore of Virginia and Fisherman Island refuges completed their Comprehensive Conservation Plan in 2004, in accordance with the 1997 Refuge Improvement Act. Public involvement has occurred throughout the process. The plan contains recommendations for enhanced, wildlife-dependent, public recreational and educational opportunities.

Eastern Virginia Rivers National Wildlife Refuge Complex

In September 2000, James River, Presquile and Rappahannock River Valley NWRs were administratively consolidated as the Eastern Virginia Rivers NWR Complex. Plum Tree Island, formerly administered from Back Bay refuge, was added to the Eastern Virginia Rivers Complex in 2003. The headquarters for the complex is located in Warsaw, Virginia.

Presquile NWR is a 1329-acre island in the James River, in the northeast corner of Chesterfield County. Historically, a USFWS-operated ferry provided access for pre-scheduled groups to view wildlife, enjoy the 0.75-mile interpretive trail, and participate in a limited deer-hunting program. In 2001, concern for visitor safety prompted the USFWS to discontinue use of the ferry for visitor transportation. In 2006, the refuge was placed in preservation status due to budget constraints. Some limited public use may still be available during pre-scheduled special events, and a pontoon boat is available on those occasions for visitor transportation. The refuge deer hunt will continue, but no hunter transportation will be provided.

James River NWR, established in 1991, currently consists of approximately 4,300 acres of primarily forested habitat in Prince George County. The refuge and surrounding area supports one of the largest summer juvenile bald eagle concentrations in the east. Visitor and education facilities that were proposed in a 1991 station management plan will be re-evaluated during the comprehensive conservation plan process, scheduled to begin in 2009 (along with Presquile). James River refuge has also been placed in preservation status due to declining budgets. The refuge will remain open for limited deer hunting during the shotgun season, but no other visitor services are currently being planned.

Rappahannock River Valley NWR was established in 1996 along a 50-mile stretch of the lower portion of the river, and includes parts of seven riverfront counties. The refuge currently contains nearly 7,800 acres with a protection target of 20,000 acres. Refuge wetlands and associated uplands provide critical habitat to a variety of plants, migratory birds, fish and other wildlife, including the threatened bald eagle and sensitive joint vetch. The refuge's Wilna Tract is open daily for freshwater fishing, photography, and wildlife observation, and several tracts are open

for public deer hunting in the fall. Three other refuge properties are open for wildlife observation by advanced reservation. The refuge began preparation of its comprehensive conservation plan in late 2005, with a scheduled completion date of mid-2007.

Plum Tree Island NWR in Poquoson is an extensive marsh system of more than 3,500 acres. The island was formerly an Air Force bombing range, which, because of potential hazards, is not available for public use. A boundary expansion in 1994 created the opportunity to acquire additional lands to the west of Plum Tree Island. New acquisitions would afford additional habitat protection, and could provide opportunities for public hunting and wildlife observation. The 225-acre Cow Island Tract, acquired in 1996, was not part of the bombing area, and is open for waterfowl hunting by permit. Plum Tree Island is one of three refuges in the complex to be placed in preservation status.

Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Potomac River NWR Complex includes the Mason Neck NWR, Occoquan Bay NWR and Featherstone NWR. The three refuges comprise 3,247 acres located near the confluence of the Occoquan and Potomac rivers, 20 miles south of Washington, D.C.

Mason Neck NWR is located in Fairfax County and consists of 2,277 acres of mature oak-hickory forest, freshwater marshes, and 4.4 miles of shoreline. Mason Neck was established in 1969 as the first federal refuge specifically for the protection of nesting, feeding and roosting habitat for the bald eagle. Seven bald eagle nests occur on or near the refuge, which has a wintering population of 60 eagles. One of the largest great blue heron rookeries in the Mid-Atlantic area (1,400+ nests) is located on the refuge. The refuge has more than 3.5-miles of hiking trails including the .75-mile Great Marsh Trail which is paved and meets ADA standards. In addition there is the 3-mile hiking/biking trail known as High Point Trail connecting Gunston Hall, the refuge, and the state park. High Point Trail also meets ADA standards. In cooperation with the adjacent Mason Neck State Park, the refuge has a managed deer hunt each fall.

Occoquan Bay NWR was established in 1998 through the transfer of the Army's Woodbridge Research Facility to the FWS. Occoquan Bay NWR consists of 644 acres of native grassland, forest, and tidally influenced marsh and wetlands. The unique variety and location of habitats on this relatively small refuge provides outstanding birding opportunities. The bird species list exceeds 220. Refuge management focuses on grasslands and grassland nesting birds. The Refuge has 6 miles of hiking trails/roads and an auto tour loop. Future plans include an office/visitor center complex. The refuge has a managed deer hunt and in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries hosts a deer hunt for youth hunters.

The staff of the refuge complex also manages the 325-acre Featherstone NWR. Located near the confluence of Neabsco Creek and the Potomac River, this refuge currently has no public access.

Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery

In 1992, the USFWS entered into an agreement with Charles City County, the Department of Conservation and Recreation and other state agencies to explore providing additional opportunities for recreational and environmental education at the Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery. As part of the challenge grant, the USFWS permitted construction of barrier free recreational fishing and picnic areas. This construction included two fishing piers, a boat dock, accessible asphalt paths and parking area and six picnic tables, two of which are handicapped accessible. In addition, a watchable wildlife area has been established, and a nature trail

extension was made. These projects, most of which were cost-shared by state and local agencies, were found to be compatible with the mission of the hatchery and resulted in only minor environmental disturbance. Plans for additional facilities are dependent on funding, compatibility with the mission of USFWS and Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery and environmental considerations. Any additional facilities constructed will be accessible in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

SEE NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND WILDLIFE AREAS MAP

Chapter IX-B-2. State Fish and Wildlife Management – Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) has statutory responsibility to manage the Commonwealth's wildlife and inland fisheries, and to protect state and federally threatened or endangered species (excluding plants and insects). The mission of DGIF is *to maintain optimum populations of all species of wildlife and fish to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunities for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; and to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting, and fishing.*

On November 7, 2000 the people of the Commonwealth voted to amend the Virginia Constitution to include the right of all citizens to hunt and fish. *Article XI. Section 4. Right of the people to hunt, fish, and harvest game. The people have a right to hunt, fish, and harvest game, subject to such regulations and restrictions as the General Assembly may prescribe by general law.* The amendment became effective January 1, 2001.

Additionally, DGIF has specific authority to acquire and develop lands and waters for public hunting, fishing, and public boating access to enhance recreational use of fish and wildlife resources. DGIF is a special fund agency whose operational and capital revenue is generated through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, boat titling and registration fees, boat sales and use taxes, a portion of federal taxes on related outdoor recreational equipment and a portion of the state sales tax on hunting, fishing and recreation-related outdoor equipment purchases.

The 2006 *Virginia Outdoors Survey* indicates that Virginians spend {7.5 million activity days hunting making hunting the 22nd most popular activity. Freshwater fishing is the 7th most popular activity, some of which occurs on the more than 3,000 miles of trout streams and 25,000 miles of warm water rivers and streams. Boating is the 10th most popular recreation activity, and more than 50 percent of the population felt that more public access to the state's waters is needed.

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Findings

- Virginians spend almost 11.2 million activity days sport hunting annually.
- Fishing is the 7th most popular outdoor recreational activity in Virginia.
- The recreational fishery resources include some of the most varied opportunities found in any state, ranging from native brook trout fishing in small mountain streams to off-shore saltwater fishing for tuna and billfish.
- The 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey indicates that boating is the 10th most popular activity among Virginians.
- The 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey found that 50.2 percent of Virginians felt that public access to water for boating, fishing, swimming and beach use was the most needed recreation facility in the Commonwealth.

- DGIF maintains a list of 120 state endangered and threatened species (including subspecies) under its jurisdiction, 58 of which also are listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act.
- More than 51% of all Virginians viewed wildlife either near their home or took a trip in the previous year to watch wildlife according to a 2003 Responsive Management Survey conducted for the Northeast Conservation Information and Education Association. Sixty-five percent of all Virginians responded that they have participated in wildlife viewing.
- Approximately 80% of Virginia's wildlife habitat is in private ownership.
- Total expenditures on wildlife watching in Virginia in 2001 amounted to \$789 Million. This included \$172 Million for travel-related expenses. Non-Virginia residents spent \$94 Million in 2001.

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Recommendations

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries should:

- Establish long-term monitoring areas in each major habitat type in partnership with other agencies or organizations wherever appropriate.
- Expand educational programs offered to the public that will emphasize environmental awareness.
- Continue conservation and management of quality wildlife habitats through public and private cooperative efforts that include conservation easements, leases, gifts and acquisitions.
- Increase angling access including shoreline fishing and picnic areas on warm water streams and department lakes, handicapped-accessible facilities at trout fishing areas where conditions are suitable, and overnight camping areas accessible by water for boaters.
- Provide increased angling opportunity through fisheries management, access development and appropriate stocking of fish
- Evaluate biannually strategies to manage specific populations of waterfowl, fish, big game, small game, nongame, furbearers and exotic species.
- Complete recovery plans for state-listed threatened and endangered species, and establishing public outreach programs with citizens' advisory groups.
- Continue to provide a professional law enforcement presence through effective conservation law enforcement training.
- Continue surveys and inventories documenting distributions and habitat associations for nongame wildlife species.
- Continue investigating and monitoring the occurrence and distribution of wildlife diseases associated with wildlife populations.

- Provide increased wildlife viewing opportunities on state and private lands through cooperative agreements and partnerships
- Use the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan, which was completed in September 2005, as a roadmap for future wildlife conservation decisions in the Commonwealth (<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov>). This proactive plan examined the health of all wildlife and prescribes actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitats before they become too rare and costly to protect (see Appendix __ for more information about the Wildlife Action Plan).

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Overview of DGIF Responsibilities

In the execution of its statutory responsibilities, the DGIF provides access to lands owned by public and private entities through a combination of cooperative management agreements; and by acquiring and managing wildlife management areas. The Commonwealth owns, through DGIF, 36 wildlife management areas comprising 200,000 acres. The DGIF also helps manage wildlife on an additional two million acres of land owned by the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Defense, Virginia Department of Forestry, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and a number of private entities. The DGIF also maintains four wildlife refuge areas totaling 1,060 acres of wildlife habitat where hunting is not permitted.

Fishery Resources

The DGIF has constructed and maintains 35 public fishing lakes totaling some 3,318 acres. In addition, the Department has agreed to manage fishery resources through contractual arrangements with public entities on 24 large reservoirs and 166 small impoundments that comprise more than 173,000 acres of impounded water. Access is maintained to a large portion of the Commonwealth's 25,000 miles of warm water streams and rivers as well as 3,000 miles of native and wild trout water.

Approximately 1.2 million trout of catchable size are stocked annually in more than 600 miles of streams and 400 acres of lakes included in DGIF's catchable trout program. The nine DGIF fish hatcheries produce and stock 10–20 million fish each year. DGIF has, along with partners on Virginia rivers, also been active in the restoration of anadromous fish. Most notably, DGIF, the James River Association, and the City of Richmond with public and private support completed the Boshers Dam Fish Passage in early 1999. For the first time in almost 200 years, the James River between Richmond and Lynchburg is open to migratory fish, such as shad and river herring, to spawn in their historic habitat. DGIF worked with several partners to remove the Embury Dam on the Rappahannock River to reopen historic spawning grounds above Fredericksburg, and is currently stocking this important river with American shad as part of the restoration program. This represents an outstanding example of public/private partnerships to enhance and protect fish and wildlife habitat.

Boating Access Program

The Boating Access Program provides 219 boating access sites across the Commonwealth. Types of boating access provided include boat ramps, boat slides, low-water ramps, and shoreline access depending on the site characterizations and water quality. The program also manages and operates these facilities.

Education and Outreach

The department's programs in Wildlife Education reach over 30,000 students annually. The DGIF conducts teacher in-service training workshops that are tied to the Standards of Learning supporting the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. The Outdoor Education and Hunter Education provide safety and introductory outdoor skills sessions to over 45,000 participants annually. *Virginia Wildlife* magazine is published monthly and offers an array of information about hunting, fishing, boating and wildlife-related recreation. Currently there are over 45,000 subscribers and every public school in Virginia receives a complimentary copy of the magazine each month.

Law Enforcement

The DGIF has the responsibility to enforce all laws and regulations for the protection, propagation and preservation of wildlife species including all fish in the inland waters of the Commonwealth. DGIF also enforces the boating laws of the state for compliance and safety.

Nongame Wildlife Program

In 1981, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation giving taxpayers the option to donate a portion of their tax refunds to The Endangered Species and Non-Game Wildlife Fund. This fund helps support the DGIF Nongame Wildlife Program. The term "nongame wildlife" generally includes all species that are not actively sought by hunters, trappers, or anglers. This includes over 90% of the approximately 1,000 vertebrate species occurring in the Commonwealth, and virtually all of the thousands of native invertebrates. This tremendous variety of species thus includes such animals as the regal fritillary butterfly, Virginia fringed mountain snail, pimpleback mussel, Roanoke logperch, carpenter frog, oak toad, eastern tiger salamander, timber rattlesnake, chicken turtle, eastern box turtle, Atlantic loggerhead sea turtle, Wilson's plover, great egret, cliff swallow, blue jay, bald eagle, short-tailed shrew, hoary bat, Delmarva fox squirrel, and eastern chipmunk, to name just a few. The primary components of our Nongame Wildlife Program include species and community research, species recovery planning and management, wildlife community inventories and surveys, interagency consultations, development of nongame wildlife regulations, and public education and assistance. These projects range from monitoring the nesting of bald eagles and peregrine falcons and implementing management actions to ensure their success; to conducting or funding surveys for breeding shorebirds or colonial waterbirds, native crayfishes, calling frogs and toads, or endangered bats; to research propagation, and augmentation of endangered freshwater mussel populations, to investigating the life history of species such as canebrake rattlesnakes, Roanoke logperch, bog turtles, northern flying squirrels, or dwarf

wedgemussels; to implementing interagency recovery programs for red-cockaded woodpeckers, Delmarva fox squirrels, bald eagles, and freshwater mussels.

Environmental Review

DGIF also participates in the interagency review and coordination of environmental permit applications and project assessments coordinated through the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, the Virginia Department of Transportation, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, and other state or federal agencies. DGIF's primary role in these projects is to determine likely impacts upon fish and wildlife resources and habitats, and to recommend appropriate measures to avoid, reduce, or compensate for those impacts. This review process is linked to the computerized Virginia Fish and Wildlife Information System (VAFWIS, www.vafwis.org), containing information about the natural histories and surveyed locations of more than 3000 vertebrate and invertebrate species.

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail

The DGIF continues to support and to participate in the development and delivery of wildlife viewing opportunities for Virginians and visitors. Currently, four birding and wildlife festivals are co-sponsored with local partners. These festivals promote wildlife conservation awareness and education while providing opportunities for wildlife viewing activities. The Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, the first statewide wildlife viewing trail in the United States, was completed in 2004. This driving trail links together more than 650 of the state's wildlife viewing areas. The Department provides technical assistance to landowners to provide public access for wildlife viewing and works with localities and local partners to improve wildlife viewing habitat for public enjoyment. In addition, the Wildlife Mapping Program and the new Virginia Master Naturalist Program (in coordination with four other state agencies) continue to promote volunteer participation in wildlife conservation efforts.

Specific site recommendations for additional water access and wildlife management areas will be found for each planning district in chapter X. For further information related to the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries programs, strategic plans or sites write, call or visit the agency's Web site at:

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

4010 West Broad Street

Richmond, VA 23230

(804) 367-1000

E-mail: dgifweb@dgif.virginia.gov

Internet Address: www.dgif.virginia.gov

IX-B-3. Virginia Marine Resources

The Marine Resources Commission serves as stewards of Virginia's marine and aquatic resources, and protectors of its tidal waters and homelands, for present and future generations.

The Virginia Marine Resources Commission has been in continuous service to the Commonwealth of Virginia for over one hundred years.

Virginia established an oyster police navy after the Civil War. Two police schooners began enforcing state boundaries, keeping order, and preventing poaching over a wide expanse of coastal waters where exploitation of seafood resources was increasing.

In the late 1800's, a State Fish Commission was created to devise conservation measures for the fisheries. This commission and the oyster police navy were merged before the turn of the century. Missions expanded throughout the 1900's including powers to make and enforce conservation regulations. Shellfish leasing was assumed from the localities and coastal surveying and mapping programs were developed during this time. Law enforcement to protect and preserve the marine resources of the Commonwealth was expanded to cover over 5,000 miles of shoreline on the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, and Virginia's Atlantic Coast. Marine habitat programs were also developed to manage and protect submerged bottomlands, wetlands, coastal sand dunes, and beaches.

Headquartered in "Tidewater Virginia" for over a century, the Marine Resources Commission continues its responsibilities for balancing the needs of a growing population for development, commerce, and recreation, with the goals of resource conservation and protection in the marine environment.

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Findings

- Virginia is ranked 3rd in the United States in volume of seafood products harvested and landed in the Commonwealth.
- Sales for recreational fishermen have increased over the past ten years.
- Recreational fishermen are responsible for supporting over 9,000 jobs in coastal Virginia.
- The estimated number of saltwater recreational anglers in Virginia has increased from 562,000 to 724,000 in the last 5 years, while the number of saltwater fishing trips has increased from 2.6 million to 3.1 million during the same period.
- For the Habitat Management Division, the number of requests for habitat permits is expected to grow, generating an increased need to balance both the public and the private interests of the marine resources of the Commonwealth.

- Approximately \$2 million dollars are currently collected annually from the sale of Recreational Saltwater Fishing License, and an additional \$750,000 is expected to be collected each year due to increases in recreational fisheries license fees.

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Recommendations

- Programs to educate recreational fishermen and create a healthy conservation ethic with regard to marine resources need to continue and expand.
- Promote a sustainable and financially viable recreational fishery in the Commonwealth that assists citizens in achieving a higher level of well-being and improves economic outputs based on increased tourism and travel.
- Collect and analyze information on fisheries stocks, harvest, landings, and amount of fishing effort, to manage quotas and allocations for harvests and landings, and to prepare fisheries conservations plans and regulations.
- Continue promotion of saltwater recreational fishing opportunities in the Commonwealth through continued construction of new reef sites, and augmentation of existing artificial fishing reef sites.
- Statewide saltwater fishing licenses should continue to enhance fishing where needed.
- Continue promotion of saltwater recreational fishing opportunities in the Commonwealth through an award program recognizing exceptional catches, conservation of recreational fisheries by promotion of a catch and release program and continued promotion of tourism and travel in Tidewater Virginia
- Maintain a permit review process based on public interest review procedures consistent with the public trust doctrine that fairly and timely balances private use of state owned submerged lands and the need to preserve habitat for sustainable fisheries

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Agency Background

Established in 1875 as the Virginia Fish Commission, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) is one of the oldest agencies in Virginia State Government. Until the last decade, shellfish regulation has dominated much of the agency's activities because of the economic and cultural importance of the oyster industry. Private leasing of State bottom for the planting and propagation of oysters appears to have begun before 1875, but it was not until 1884 that the Commonwealth set up the Board of the Chesapeake to handle the regulations of the oyster industry. Public oyster grounds were mapped (the so-called Baylor Survey) during 1892-1895.

The Fish Commission, which at that time dealt with both fresh and saltwater fisheries issues, was consolidated with the Board of the Chesapeake in 1898 to form the Board of Fisheries, later the Commission of Fisheries, which was given the task of managing all shellfish and finfish issues statewide.

The Habitat Management Division of the Commission traces its origin to 1962 when the responsibility for permit encroachments in or over State-owned submerged lands was transferred from the Office of the Attorney General to the Commission of Fisheries. This made marine management in Virginia unique in that living resources, and the habitat on which they depend, came under the jurisdiction of the same agency.

A legislative study commission in 1967 recommended a broadened mission resulting in the agency being renamed the Virginia Marine Resources Commission in 1968 by an act of the Virginia General Assembly. The Virginia Wetlands Act was passed in 1972 and placed under the management of VMRC, as was the 1980 Coastal Primary Sand Dune Protection Act. In 1982, the General Assembly broadened the 1972 Wetlands Act to include non-vegetated wetlands. In 1984, a distinct Fisheries Management Division was created and its authority over fisheries issues was strengthened.

VMRC Programs Related to Outdoor Recreation

While VMRC was first established because of the cultural and economic importance of the oyster industry, the impacts of recreation on the state's marine resources have become more significant. Virginia's recreational fishermen support a \$1.26 billion fishing industry and spend more money than their commercial counterparts. Saltwater angling totals \$820 million in sales and \$480 million in services provided. In 2004, the saltwater angling supported over 9,000 jobs (<http://www.dailypress.com>, *Sport Fishermen Angle for Clout*. February 17, 2006). In an effort to manage these resources and encourage appropriate conservation ethics for those engaging in outdoor recreation in marine environments and to balance user conflicts between commercial and recreational fishermen, several programs have been developed.

[subsection of VMRC Programs Related to Outdoor Recreation]Fishery Management

In 1984, the Virginia General Assembly enacted a state fishery management policy with a goal to manage fisheries based on the best available scientific, economic, biological, and sociological information available. This policy marked a shifting away from fisheries controlled by legislation, to fisheries managed by plans and regulations of the Marine Resources Commission. In this vein, a legislative report recommended:

While fisheries management is now based upon professionally prepared plans for the major species, using the best available data and analysis, regulatory decisions are made in an open and democratic process by the agency's nine-member commission. Public sessions of the nine-member citizen commission include hearings, open discussion of resource management issues, adoption of conservation regulations, and environmental permit decisions. Time and attention are always given to allow citizen input.

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The Fisheries Management Division carries out current and long-term state policies effecting saltwater fisheries--recreational and commercial in Virginia's tidal waters. The Division's goal is to provide the maximum benefit and long-term use of the Commonwealth's finfish and shellfish resources through conservation and enhancement. Its objectives are:

1. to collect comprehensive and timely statistics and information on Virginia's fisheries to determine fishery stock conditions;
2. to develop fisheries management plans for commercially and recreationally important species found in Virginia waters;
3. to promote recreational fishing activity by the development of artificial fishing reefs and the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament; and to participate in organizations at the interstate and federal level regarding Virginia's fisheries and their management.

Artificial Reefs

The Division's Artificial Reef Department enhances recreational fishing opportunities through the construction of artificial fishing reefs. Twenty sites have been established, fifteen in Chesapeake Bay and five in the Atlantic. A variety of "materials of opportunity", such as steel vessel hulls and demolition concrete has been used as well as specifically designed habitat structures. Most of the sites are marked with yellow "special purpose" buoys, established and maintained by the Artificial Reef Program.

Approximately one million anglers go fishing each year in the tidal waters of Virginia. Recreational fishing is economically important for its contributions to travel, tourism, and the sport fishing industry. Man-made reef structures enhance the bottom habitat, increase the production of fisheries, and improve recreational fishing.

State-supported efforts to construct artificial fishing reefs began with six surplus World War II liberty ships which were sunk offshore to create increased fishing opportunities. Virginia is currently using a variety of materials and structures to construct reefs in the Atlantic Ocean and Chesapeake Bay. Extensive research and study go into the planning, design, and construction of artificial reefs. Reef structures may include tires cast in concrete and precast concrete igloo structures.

Saltwater Fishing Tournament

The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament operates a trophy fish citation program for marine recreational fishermen and promotes Virginia's diverse tidal fishing opportunities. The program manages a database of citation records dating from 1958, which is utilized for recreational fisheries management purposes.

Virginia Saltwater Recreational Fishing Development Fund

In July 1992, the Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation authorizing the implementation of a saltwater recreational fishing license. Pursuant to Virginia Code § 28.3-302.3 funds collected by the Commonwealth of Virginia for the sale of those license are deposited in a special non-reverting fund and used to improve recreational fisheries in Virginia. These provisions include; conserving and enhancing finfish species, fishing access and facilities, law enforcement, education, administration of the Virginia Saltwater Sport Fishing Tournament, fisheries research and data collection, and habitat improvement. The Recreational Fishing Advisory Board (RFAB) of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission is charged with advising the Commission on the management of that fund (VSRFDF) consistent with the enabling legislation

[subsection of VMRC Programs Related to Outdoor Recreation]

Habitat Management

The Habitat Management Division manages a permit program encompassing subaqueous habitat preservation and the protection and preservation of tidal wetlands as well as coastal primary sand dunes. The Joint Permit Application, introduced in 1978 streamlines the permit process to handle local/state and federal requirements in one form.

The Commonwealth of Virginia is endowed with over 5,242 miles of tidal shoreline encompassing 2,300 square miles of water surface covering 1,472,000 acres of state - owned bottomlands. These submerged lands, greater in area than the State of Delaware, harbor some 21,000 acres of Chesapeake Bay grasses, 251,000 acres of public oyster grounds, and 102,000 acres of oyster grounds under private lease. These lands are a public resource and a valuable habitat for shellfish, crabs and finfish. Along the fringes of the myriad coves, creeks, great rivers and bays of the Chesapeake estuary grow some 225,000 acres of vegetated tidal wetlands. These vegetated areas, particularly the salt marshes, constitute a vital spawning and nursery area and are an important element of the marine food webs for many economically valuable marine resources of the Commonwealth.

The evaluation of proposed shoreline projects requires the balanced considerations of often-complex environmental, socio-political and economic factors. Perhaps nowhere else have the Commission's decisions been more difficult in the last several years than in the area of marina development. The issue of new marinas, particularly in localities without local zoning, and proposed marina expansions, continue to conflict with shellfish growing areas. The continued emphasis on the Chesapeake Bay cleanup effort and anticipated population increases within Tidewater will continue to make this a very important issue.

Submerged Lands

Much of the charge for ensuring that the Commonwealth's submerged lands resources are responsibly used rests with the Division, operating under the mandates of Virginia's Subaqueous Laws. The Code of Virginia vests ownership of "all the beds of the bays, rivers, creeks, and shores of the sea in the Commonwealth to be used as a common by all the people of Virginia." Permits are required from the Marine Resources Commission to encroach upon or over State-owned bottomlands. The division receives and reviews these applications, solicits public comment on them, applies public interest factors in assessing them, and then prepares a recommendation to the Commissioner or Commission for a decision.

Tidal Wetlands

While the value of marine habitat resources along the shoreline is recognized today, throughout most of Virginia history waterways and marshes were often filled to make land. Many coastal towns like Norfolk were built on fill placed over wetlands. A 1972 state law recognized the environmental value of tidal wetlands. This legislation authorized a permitting system for their protection; and authorized a network of local wetlands boards to make conservation-vs-development decisions.

Dunes and Beaches

Inappropriate development on coastal primary sand dunes and beaches can destroy vegetation; alter storm protecting contours; increase erosion flooding and property damage; destroy wildlife habitat; and lead to increased expenditures of public funds. Coastal primary sand dunes and beaches were added to marine habitat protection legislation in 1982. Following the same principles previously established for wetlands protection, the Coastal Primary Sand Dunes Act requires permits in order to insure that development is reasonably balanced with the protection and preservation of these coastal features.

[Begin textbox]

Selected Resources

Virginia Marine Resources Commission

<http://www.mrc.state.va.us/>

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Chapter IX-B-4. State Forests – Department of Forestry

The greatest wonder is that we can see these trees and not wonder more. - **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Virginia's forests are extremely diverse and provide a multitude of both environmental and social benefits. Of the Commonwealth's 16.2 million forested acres, 77% are in private ownership. The importance of forests in cleansing air, purifying water, providing products and fostering recreation opportunities is unparalleled. Forests are also provide critically important wildlife corridors for the movement and sustainability of a biodiversity of species.

Virginia's forests are also the backbone of a strong economy with the forest products industry providing a vital income source for both rural and smaller cities. Based on the *2001 Virginia Forests: Our Commonwealth*, the forest industry is worth \$25.4 billion in annual total economic output. This also includes the "multiplier effect"-jobs and income created as forestry and forest product workers buy goods and services. The industry also generates 248,000 jobs and landowners received \$ 345 million for the timber stumpage.

The state of Virginia has the one of the longest recorded histories of European influence in the United States. Since 1607, Virginia has utilized its forest resources for economic prosperity. Virginia continues to utilize these resources but under the cloud of a changing landscape. Rural Virginia is continuously changing. It is estimated that 22,000 acres of Virginia's forests are converted to non-forest uses each year. Within the more metropolitan Chesapeake Bay watershed, 100 acres per day are converted. Virginia is not alone among states in this phenomenon, but is at the forefront of an ever-increasing change that shows little appearance of slowing. One fact to bear in mind is that Virginia's forests are predominantly privately owned and these owners possess a strong sense of private property rights.

At the heart of the deforestation trend are the land values generated by development. Whether converted to subdivision or commercial strip, land values skyrocket when development approaches and rural "working forestlands" convert to other uses. This conversion and subsequent loss of forestland gradually diminishes the ecological functions and values of forests which contribute to all Virginians' quality of life.

The Department of Forestry (DOF) assists landowners with demonstrations of wetland practices, coastal plain and steep mountain water quality practices, hardwood improvement practices and other projects. An urban forestry program offers cities and smaller communities the expertise to maintain a forest canopy over their community and take advantage of the environmental and aesthetic benefits provided by the tree cover. The DOF is also the lead state agency for the conservation and restoration of riparian forest and other buffers in the Commonwealth.

The DOF Strategic Plan entitled DOF 2014: "Shaping Virginia's Forests" names four land management goals for agency. They are as follows:

1. Protect the citizens, their property and the forest resources from wildfire
2. Protect, promote, and enhance forested watersheds, non-tidal wetlands, and riparian areas
3. Conserve the forest landbase

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State Forests102006.doc

4. Improve the stewardship, health, and diversity of the forest resource

The Department accomplished these goals through a strong statewide workforce operating locally in touch with local issues. Conservation organizations such as land trusts and other non-government organizations assist the Department of Forestry with protection, conservation, and management efforts. Our Mission is to ...”protect and develop healthy, sustainable forest resources for all Virginians”.

Findings

- Urban and suburban sprawl areas are causing significant loss of Virginia’s commercial forestlands.
- It is estimated that 17% of Virginia’s land base, 4.3 million acres of forestland, will be absorbed by commercial and residential use over the next 20 years.
- Growing fragmentation of forest cover due to an increased number of landowners and pressure of population is associated with the loss of total acreage. The transition from rural to urban forests occurs when the population rises from 20 to 70 people per square mile.
- Small woodlot management is becoming increasingly important as it allows forest management activities on smaller acreages.
- The loss of timberland has an adverse impact on the timber economy, but the economic impact of forest loss in terms of ecosystem services value(s) such as clean water and air is of equal concern.

Recommendations

The Virginia Department of Forestry should:

- Continue to emphasize best management practices and stewardship of forest land for properties adjoining the recreation systems identified in the *Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP)*, e.g., Scenic Rivers, Virginia Byways, natural areas.
- Encourage green infrastructure planning approach to lands protection and provide training in these concepts.
- In concert with our state and non-government partners, meet the Governor’s goal of 400,000 conserved acres by 2010.
- Coordinate with, and seek the assistance of, trail and river user organizations to develop forest trails and publish maps for each state forest as well as establish greenways and blueways for public use.
- Continue to acquire in holdings and other properties to improve forest boundary lines, improve management, and add environmentally diverse property to the state forest system.

- Initiate or maintain cooperative agreements to support the Natural Heritage Program's natural resource database.
- Work with other natural resource agencies to promote good resource stewardship principles on state forest land and conduct citizen education outreach activities on state-owned land.
- Stress the importance of the urban canopy and help localities set goals.

State Forest History

Virginia's state forest system had its beginning in 1919 with the bequest of 589 acres of land in Prince Edward County. In the mid-1930s, additional land was added as a result of federal government acquisitions under the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act. Virginia's state forests are managed for multiple uses. The original purpose of the state forests was for public use, recreation, wildlife management and forest production to: (1) demonstrate good forest practices for private landowners, (2) provide educational opportunities for the public and (3) establish and maintain long-term research efforts.

Starting with a gift of 589 acres in 1919, Virginia's state forest system now consists of 47,899 acres in 17 forest units. The majority of this land has been donated to the state by the federal government and private individuals. The system is managed by the Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF), which became a department-level agency in 1987. DOF operates 3 tree nurseries that produce in excess of 48 million seedlings annually.

Although the focus of the state forest system is the practical application of sound forestry practices, approximately 17 percent of the total area has been set aside for purposes other than timber production. The forest is used for long-term research efforts. This includes manipulation of the forest cover to study changes in water quality, studies on the re-introduction of the American chestnut into the forest setting, and programs, which support stewardship of our forest and land resources.

The 17 state forests and three nurseries contribute substantially to meeting educational and recreational demand. They are managed for multiple uses, including watershed protection, recreation, timber production, applied forest research programs, and wildlife and fisheries management. The 4 largest forests located in Central Virginia provide the resource base for the state parks within them, which round out recreational opportunities by providing camping, picnicking, interpretive and swimming facilities.

Natural areas have been designated at 13 locations in the forest system. These areas, comprising more than 320 acres, are used for environmental studies and management. The wildlife and fishery resources in state forests are managed with the assistance of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. This successful partnership is evident by the popularity of Virginia's forests with hunters, fishermen and nature lovers throughout the state.

The majority of state forest acreage is in the central Piedmont region between Richmond and Lynchburg. Acquisition of additional units throughout Virginia is being considered. Existing areas are shown on the map below.

Virginia Department of Forestry

Fontaine Research Park

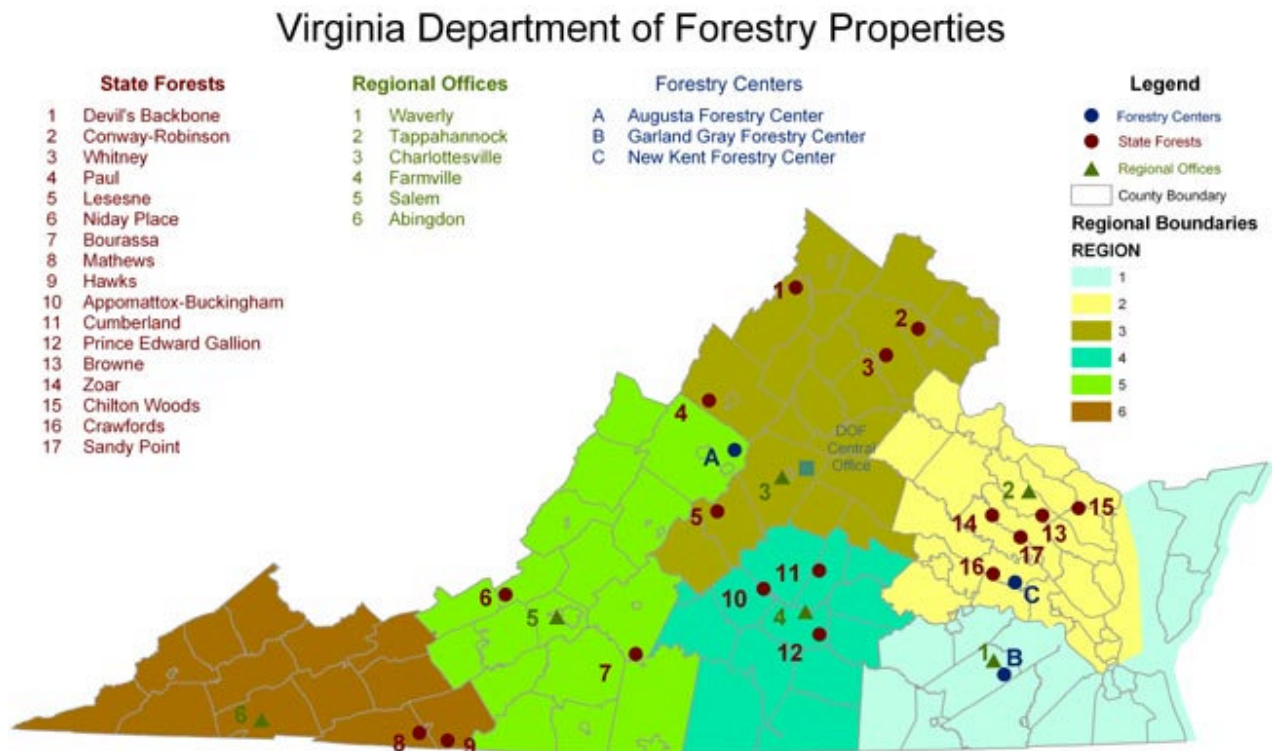
900 Natural Resources Drive, Suite 800

Charlottesville, VA 22903

(804) 977-6555

www.vdof.org

INSERT 9: STATE PARKS, FORESTS AND FORESTRY CENTERS MAP



Last modified 2006-03-23

Virginia Department of Forestry

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Virginia Department of Forestry programs are open to all people regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or disability. EEO/AA

Chapter IX-B-6. Transportation Programs

Virginia's transportation system plays a major role in defining the quality of life enjoyed by its citizens. Many people rely on the automobile as a primary mode of transportation, while others frequently use public transportation, rail or commuter services to get from place to place. No matter which way people choose to travel in Virginia, a comprehensive, safe, efficient and effective transportation system is essential. As Virginia's population grows, so do the number of vehicle trips on the road system. In many areas of the state the road system has been overwhelmed by traffic growth. As traffic congestion increases, the demand for rail, public transportation and commuter services also increases. Residential and commercial development is occurring in areas where the existing transportation systems are not capable of meeting greater demands. Local governments approve new development projects in their jurisdictions; however, in most counties, it is the state's responsibility to provide for the road system.

Continued viability of the transportation system depends on good planning. State and local governments must continually balance development with existing and proposed capacities of roads, rail and transit systems to meet the demand generated by development.

Transportation Planning in Virginia

In Virginia, the Secretary of Transportation oversees five modal agencies – the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), the Department of Aviation (DOAV), the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), and the Virginia Port Authority (VPA). *VTrans2025* is Virginia's statewide multimodal long-range transportation plan, and serves as the guiding document for all transportation agencies under the Secretary.

VTrans2025 provides a comprehensive, integrated approach to meeting the transportation needs of our growing population and economy. *VTrans2025* is led by the Office of the Secretary of Transportation, and is coordinated through the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) with the participation of each transportation agency in the Secretariat. Representatives from the Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions (VAPDC), several metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) also participate in the *VTrans2025* planning effort.

One aim and outcome of *VTrans2025* is the improved coordination of land use and transportation decisions. Local land use decisions and transportation system enhancements are unavoidably related. In Virginia, land use management rests with local governments and transportation system management rests with the state. Issues arise when there are differences in state and local perspectives as well as different timeframes for development activities. The state's role is to safeguard the transportation network and represent the public's interests, while localities generally have a more parochial perspective with respect to local economic development. Also, land use decisions can be

approved in a relatively short time frame (less than a year), while transportation projects can take a decade or more for planning, funding, and construction.

[Insert Textbox]

Findings:

- The U. S. Department of Transportation administers the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003. SAFETEA-LUE, as this act is called, provides funding and direction for the development of multi-modal transportation systems in the country. Funding is available for bicycle, pedestrian, safety, transportation enhancements, and other projects that affect our lives and offer alternatives to vehicular travel.
- *VTrans2025* serves as the blueprint for transportation planning across all modes at the state level. The *VTrans2025* Final Report was submitted to the Governor and General Assembly in December 2004 and included an analysis of issues; vision, goals and objectives; multimodal needs assessment; gap analysis; and policy recommendations
- Virginia's transportation planning effort, the *VTrans2025* Final Report, identified numerous policy recommendations in the areas of funding and investment, land use, connectivity, priority setting, and sustaining the *VTrans2025* vision. A *VTrans2025* Action Plan was prepared in April 2005 to identify specific steps necessary to implement the policy recommendations and otherwise further multimodal planning in the Commonwealth. The Action Plan also identified key initiatives of the Commonwealth's new Multimodal Office, including development of a Progress Report, development of a Performance Report, development of a Multimodal Freight Study, identification of major statewide multimodal corridors, and coordination and outreach.
- Automobile-oriented communities make it difficult to integrate walking into daily routines. Furthermore, approximately one-quarter of all walking trips take place on roads without sidewalks or shoulders and bike lanes are available for only 5 percent of bike trips.

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Recommendations

- Greater emphasis needs to be placed on providing alternatives to the use of private automobiles for daily activities. Transit systems, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, improved community design, as well as a change in people's attitudes toward transportation alternatives will be needed for the transportation system of the future to meet capacity needs and energy constraints. (www.vtrans.org)
- As an alternative to building wider highways, greater attention should be given to moving truck traffic onto rail where the correct combination of commodities,

- distance, cost, and delivery time permit. *VTrans* is conducting a Statewide Multimodal Freight Study that will focus on the critical freight transportation infrastructure across the state. This study will provide recommended improvements to the system, as well as guidance on the appropriateness of diverting freight to rail, and regulatory requirements.
- Facilitate the efficient movement of people and goods, expand choices and improve interconnectivity of all transportation modes.
 - Priority should be given to eliminating potential transportation barriers for the public, and improving the linkages of recreation areas across major transportation corridors.
 - A formal process for evaluating and developing public access sites needs to be established for bridge crossings of recreational waterways.
 - Further improvement is needed to coordinate land use and transportation planning in Virginia. VDOT is in the process of developing regulations in response to recent General Assembly legislation requiring localities to seek VDOT comment on all comprehensive plans, rezonings, subdivisions, and site plan analyses.
 - DRPT and DCR should establish a process for working with railroads on rails with trails and crossings of railroads for water access purposes.
 - Local governments should encourage the development of a permanent process for integrating the recommendations of local public health agencies and active living into all phases of land use planning.

Surface Transportation Agencies and the Outdoors Plan

VDOT and DRPT have the greatest impact on the Virginia Outdoors Plan from a transportation perspective. The following sections highlight current activities at each agency that support the recommendations above.

Virginia Department of Transportation

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is responsible for building, maintaining and operating the state's roads, bridges and tunnels to facilitate the efficient and safe movement of people and goods. VDOT works closely with the other state transportation agencies on issues related to rail, transit, aviation, and ports. Virginia has the third-largest state-maintained highway system in the country, just behind Texas and North Carolina. VDOT has roughly 9,300 employees, making it one of the three largest state agencies in Virginia.

The Commonwealth Transportation Board guides the department's work, acting like a board of directors. The Secretary of Transportation serves as chairman, and the Commonwealth Transportation Commissioner serves as vice-chairman. The 17 Board members are appointed by the Governor and approved by the General Assembly. The Director of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation also sits as a non-voting member. Draft VOP – Chapter IX. Transportation Programs

member. Board meetings are held monthly and are open to the public. The Commonwealth Transportation Board oversees both VDOT and DRPT.

State Bicycle and Pedestrian Program

The Virginia Department of Transportation's State Bicycle and Pedestrian Program promotes bicycling and walking within the state. Since the late 1970s it has provided:

- planning assistance to state and local transportation planners
- activity coordination for various bicycle committees
- bicycle and pedestrian education and safety promotions

In order to make the State Bicycle and Pedestrian Program successful, many people within VDOT and from other agencies and interests participate in activities related to the program.

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Policy Implementation Team is responsible for ensuring consistent implementation of bicycle and pedestrian policies within VDOT. The main guiding policy document is the Commonwealth Transportation Board's *Policy for Integrating Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodations*, adopted in March, 2004. It can be found at: www.virginiadot.org/bikepedpolicy. The team periodically reviews, evaluates and recommends modifications to VDOT's bicycle and pedestrian policies and practices. It is the primary forum in which information on bicycle and pedestrian issues is considered and developed. The team consists of the District Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinators and representatives from the following VDOT divisions:

- Asset Management
- Location and Design
- Local Assistance
- Structure and Bridge
- Traffic Engineering
- Transportation and Mobility Planning
- Programming

VDOT also partners with other state agencies in the areas of healthy communities, safety education and encouragement of bicycling and walking opportunities. Program staff also assists with bicycle and pedestrian related studies.

State Bicycle Map

VDOT is developing a statewide bicycle map that will indicate the location of United States Bicycle Routes 1 and 76, and trails and other facilities of statewide significance.

Education

To support bicycle safety education programs, VDOT works with the Department of Education, the Department of Health's Center for Injury Prevention and the Department

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of Motor Vehicles. These programs help educators, civic groups and parents teach children about traffic rules and safe riding as well as help children gain bicycle handling skills.

Safe Routes to School

The purpose of the Federal Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program is to address issues of traffic congestion and air quality around schools, as well as pedestrian and bicycle safety. In addition, a growing body of evidence has shown that children who lead sedentary lifestyles are at risk for a variety of health problems such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. Safety issues are also a big concern for parents, who consistently cite traffic danger as a reason why their children are unable to bicycle or walk to school. At its heart, the SRTS Program empowers communities to make walking and bicycling to school a safe and routine activity once again. The Program makes funding available for a wide variety of programs and projects, from building safer street crossings to establishing programs that encourage children and their parents to walk and bicycle safely to school.

Importance of Outdoor Recreation for Youth and Children

The Virginia Commission on Youth reports that 89 percent of fourth graders watched television, videos, or movies for an average of 110 minutes in a health department study. In addition, 58 percent reported playing video or computer games for an average of 68 minutes. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that 43 percent of the nation's children watch more than two hours of television per day. Children are spending more time indoors involved in sedentary activities.

The Commission on Youth reports that the lack of physical activity in young people is further compounded by the declining importance of physical education in the schools. In addition to much heavier loads of homework, not all children attend daily physical education classes. The problem is compounded by the fact that most children do not walk to school. In fact, the rise in obesity rates parallels a significant decline in walking. Between 1977 and 1995, the number of yearly pedestrian trips declined 21 percent among Americans. In 1969, approximately half of all schoolchildren walked or bicycled to or from school; today, fewer than 15 percent of children and adolescents use their own power to get to school. Parents consistently cite traffic danger as a reason why their children cannot bicycle or walk to school. The Safe Routes to Schools Program is working with communities to reverse this trend and make walking and bicycling to school a safe and routine activity.

[Begin Text Box

"After our "Walking Friday" event, the teachers all reported that the students were more attentive and calm than on other days. Just a small amount of physical activity before school seemed to help the kids focus in class. We were so pleased to see the long lines of kids, parents, siblings, and friends coming down the sidewalk toward school. I think everyone was surprised to see how willing people were to walk or bicycle to school!" - Mrs. Karen Marcus, principal, Crozet Elementary School

End Text Box]

Although typically a featured amenity at high schools and some middle schools, tracks or pathways are now being built at some elementary schools to encourage children and the surrounding neighborhood to become more active. In Chesterfield County, a health-department study of the body-mass index of public school children helped the Coalition for Active Children (COACH) target high-risk areas of the county for track development. COACH is also focused on improving nutrition and increasing physical activity among young people. The coalition began in 2002 with members from public and private organizations, including health, education, physical-fitness and nutrition professionals, concerned parents, and community and business leaders.

With the prevalence of chronic disease brought on by sedentary lifestyles, life expectancy for today's children is shrinking. One estimate for the reduction in life expectancy associated with obesity-related diabetes is approximately 13 years. With the future health of our children and our nation at stake, intervention is crucial. By partnering with the health community parks and recreation departments and other providers of outdoor recreation could have a major role to play in reversing disturbing public health trends.

Pull-Out Box

Surgeon General Vice Admiral Richard H. Carmona reports that nine million children in the United States are now considered obese. What does this mean for the future? Who will perform physically strenuous jobs such as police officers, firefighters, soldiers and construction workers? Will children be plagued with disease, as they grow older? Carmona believes that the key is to start with prevention at an early age- "we have to raise prevention the way we've raised care." Polly Roberts, Richmond.com, April 05, 2006

End Pull-Out

Statewide Multimodal Freight Study

VDOT is participating in the VTrans2025 Statewide Multimodal Freight Study. This study will examine recommendations to the critical freight transportation infrastructure across the state as well as regulations and policies that impact freight mobility. Study will also examine the possibility of increasing opportunities for diversion of freight truck traffic to rail. A single inter-modal train can take around 280 trucks off the road, while a carload train can take 500 trucks off the road. In 2001, the railroads hauled 189 million tons of freight to, from, through, and within Virginia. At 15 tons per truckload, it would take 12.6 million annual truck trips (around 38,000 to 40,000 per day) to move this much freight.

Scenic Highways and Virginia Byways Program

VDOT and DCR administer the scenic roads program. This program is discussed in more detail in another chapter. VDOT updates and publishes a scenic roads map on a periodic basis.

Healthy Communities

VDOT participates in the Virginia Department of Health's Division of Chronic Disease's healthy communities project. This project, which is one of 11 projects nationwide supported by the Centers for Disease Control, focuses on making the places where people live, work and go to school healthier by introducing physical activity into the community environment.

VDOT and the Department of Conservation and Recreation are working together to encourage non-motorized access as part of park master planning and to emphasize non-traditional transportation corridors, such as greenways, in our transportation mix. Greenways contribute to a healthy community by providing alternative transportation modes as well as places to exercise that are free of vehicles.

Highway Beautification Program

VDOT designs, installs, and maintains attractively landscaped medians, shoulders, interchanges, and rest areas along the state's highways and byways. These attractive improvements contribute to everyone's enjoyment of driving. Additionally, VDOT has established standards for vegetation management that encourage correct pruning of trees, shrubs, and ground covers.

Recreational Access Road Program

VDOT administers the Recreational Access Roads program under § 33.1-223 of the Code of Virginia. Funds appropriated under this program can be used for the construction and maintenance of roads and bikeways providing access to public recreational areas and historical sites.

The Commonwealth Transportation Board allocates the sum of \$3 million for the construction, reconstruction, maintenance or improvement of access roads and bikeways within counties, cities and towns. Funds from this program can be used: when the Director of DCR designates a public recreational area as such; or when the Director of the Department of Historic Resources determines a site or area to be historic and recommends that an access road or bikeway be provided or maintained. These funds may also be used when the governing body of the county, city or town in which the access road or bikeway is to be provided or maintained passes a resolution requesting the road and adopts an ordinance pursuant to Article 7 (§ 15.2-2280 et seq.) of Chapter 22 of Title 15.2.

Transportation Enhancement Grants

The federal Transportation Enhancement program was first established by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) enacted by Congress in 1991. The legislation required each state to set aside 10% of its Surface Transportation Program

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(STP) funds for enhancement activities. The legislation established 12 eligible activities meant to improve non-motorized transportation, enhance the public's traveling experience, revitalize communities and improve the quality of life. These federal funds cannot be used for roadway improvements or traditional highway projects.

To qualify for federal Transportation Enhancement funds a project must have a relationship to surface transportation and must qualify under one or more of the 12 eligible activities. Projects may relate to transportation through function (e.g. trails, historic bridge restoration), impact (e.g. a rain garden to mitigate run-off), or proximity (for example, removing billboards from a highway viewshed). Approximately 75% of funded projects involve some improvements for bicycling and/or walking.

Scenic River Crossings

The General Assembly has designated 20 scenic rivers in the Commonwealth. In most cases these scenic rivers are crossed by state roads. VDOT has done a good job of signing these crossings so travelers know they are going over a scenic river. However, many bridges have jersey barriers installed as railings, and these barriers do not afford a view of the river. In many other cases VDOT has installed railing systems that afford views of the river. This approach is preferable, and should be adopted where appropriate and feasible for all future scenic river bridge crossings. [This section is misleading. Guard rails are put up to address potential or existing **safety** issues, not to block scenic views.]

Public water access at bridge crossings

The need for access to the waters of the state for recreation has been identified as one of the highest needs by respondents to the Virginia Outdoors Survey. Many highway bridges span suitable recreational waterways where a boat ramp or hand carry launch and parking area would provide access to a river. VDOT must balance the scenic aspects of bridge crossing with the necessary safety precautions. Guard rails are installed to address existing or potential safety issues, and sometimes can obstruct scenic views. VDOT does not intentionally seek to block access. Where popular river sections do not have a formal public access facility, efforts should be made to establish one in coordination with the locality and property owners. The best time to do this may be when a bridge is being replaced.

A protocol needs to be established between DCR, DGIF, and VDOT that screens bridge replacement projects to determine whether the waterway being crossed is suitable for establishment of public access. If it is determined that public access is needed at the site, then a negotiation process between the state, locality and adjacent landowners should take place in conjunction with the bridge replacement project. A dedicated source of funding for water access should be tied to this effort. The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries manages the state's public access program, but the use of their funds is limited to power boating access in most cases. VDOT also has limited funding capability for construction of these types of access. Additional funds are needed to construct access sites for hand carry boats and for fisherman access.

Land Use and Transportation Planning Activities

In addition to the above programs, VDOT is in the process of developing regulatory guidance on the review of local comprehensive plans, site plans, rezonings and subdivisions as required by recent legislation (§ 15.2-2222.1). This review process will enable VDOT to better examine local land use decisions made on, or along, the state transportation network, providing an opportunity for VDOT to comment to local government officials during the land use decision making process.

VDOT will also be developing a State Bicycle Plan in the near future, which will focus on the development of recommendations for United States Bicycle Routes 1 and 76 in Virginia.

Department of Rail and Public Transportation

As a state agency reporting to the Secretary of Transportation, DRPT works closely with VDOT, which is responsible for highways, as well as other transportation agencies responsible for aviation and ports. Each of DRPT's three primary areas of activity (rail, public transportation, and commuter services) focus on the movement of people and goods throughout Virginia.

[Subheading for Dept. of Rail and Public Transportation]

Rail Transportation

Rail transportation involves the movement of people and goods on railways owned and operated by private railroad companies. There are more than a dozen railroad companies and services in Virginia, including Norfolk Southern, CSX, Amtrak, VRE, and nine shortline railroads. Freight rail programs help ensure the economic vitality of businesses and communities with a cost-effective, reliable way to bring goods to market, while passenger rail programs relieve congestion on highways and offer travelers more transportation choices. DRPT supports both passenger and freight rail initiatives through funding options, expert advice, research, and advocacy. To safeguard Virginia's connections to the national rail network, DRPT represents the state's interests in interstate and national rail issues.

A single intermodal train can take around 280 trucks off the road, while a carload train can take 500 trucks off the road. In 2001, the railroads hauled 189 million tons of freight to, from, through, and within Virginia. At 15 tons per truckload, it would take 12.6 million annual truck trips (around 38,000 to 40,000 per day) to move this much freight.

Additional benefits of rail transportation include:

- **Improved air quality and reduced use of fossil fuels.** For every ton-mile of freight, rail produces around one-third the particulate matter and nitrogen oxide emissions of trucking.

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- **Improved safety.** By reducing congestion on critical highway segments, rail contributes to lower accident rates and increased safety. Rail is the safest mode for hazardous materials shipments, with substantially fewer hazmat releases than trucking.
- **Improved mobility and choice for Virginia's commuters.** In comparison to driving and parking costs, passenger rail can be a more affordable alternative. Passenger rail also provides an alternative to traveling on congested roadways. Reliable passenger rail service is a "safety net," providing positive redundancy in the Commonwealth's transportation system.

[Subheading for Dept. of Rail and Public Transportation] Public Transportation

Public Transportation systems help manage traffic congestion and provide transportation choices while safely transporting people to destinations across the Commonwealth. There are more than forty public transportation systems in Virginia that range in size from two-bus programs in small towns to larger regional systems like WMATA (Metrorail) in Northern Virginia and HRT in Hampton Roads. Some systems are fee-based, while others provide free access for the elderly and disabled. There are more than 50 human transportation services in Virginia. By advising, supporting and funding public transportation programs statewide, DRPT helps provide safe, reliable transportation options for everyone.

[Subheading for Dept. of Rail and Public Transportation] Commuter Services

Commuter Services programs work to promote carpools, vanpools, tele-work and other alternative modes of transportation to Virginia's commuters. These programs not only save people (and employers) time and money, they can also help manage traffic congestion and benefit the environment. DRPT currently partners with fifteen commuter service programs operating in the Commonwealth to provide people with information, business incentives, and ride-matching services at no charge.

[Subheading for Dept. of Rail and Public Transportation] How Important Is Public Transportation in Virginia?

If everyone in Northern Virginia who normally rides Metrorail had to drive a car to work instead, the resulting traffic jam would stretch from Washington, D.C. to North Carolina. If everyone who carpools in Virginia drove alone, the added vehicles would create two lanes of parked traffic from Richmond to Orlando.

Make no mistake about it- public transportation in Virginia is important. Three of the 75 largest transit agencies in the country operate here. Metrorail is the nation's second most heavily-used rail transit system, with 143,500 daily riders in northern Virginia alone. The

Virginia Railway Express (VRE) commuter rail system is one of the fastest-growing commuter rail services in America.

More than 40 public transit agencies, 50 human service providers and 15 commuter assistance agencies carry nearly 700,000 Virginians to work every day in something other than their own cars. Carpools, vanpools, public transit, passenger ferry, commuter rail, walking, biking and tele-working are all smart ways that Virginians can get to work.

- **Public transportation offers two main benefits- time and money.** People who commute daily with public transportation save over \$5,000 a year in fuel, car maintenance and parking fees- roughly a semester of tuition at a Virginia public university. And instead of sitting in traffic for up to 34 hours a year, they spend that time doing things like gardening, relaxing and playing with their children. It's like having an extra week of vacation.
- **For thousands of people, public transportation is their only choice.** Just ask the riders of the Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) system. Nearly half of them couldn't get to work, to school, to the doctor or to market without an HRT bus. And for the disabled and the elderly, public transportation is a lifeline.
- **Public transportation riders aren't the only beneficiaries.** Every commuter railcar takes up to 200 vehicles off the road. Every bus takes up to 60 vehicles off the road and every van takes up to 14. And when cars stay off the road, their pollutants stay out of the air. In Virginia, our lungs are spared from 2.5 million pounds of hydrocarbons and 3.1 million pounds of nitrogen oxides thanks to public transportation.

[Subheading for Dept. of Rail and Public Transportation Rails with Trails Program

Rail lines are in use across the Commonwealth, and there are many locations at which highways cross the railroad. It is preferable that all crossings be grade separated to minimize the impact on roadway traffic flow and the risk of accidents. Where a crossing must be at-grade, warning systems are used to indicate the presence of the railroad. These warning systems may be passive in low traffic areas, with just a sign indicating the presence of the railroad. In high traffic areas active warning systems are used, which include gates and flashing lights. Railroads are concerned about the safety of their personnel, their equipment and the public at any location where rail lines interface with the public. They are reluctant to have the public on their property for any public purpose due to these concerns.

Many localities and citizen groups have designed trail systems that must cross or run parallel to active rail lines. Also, there are many locations in Virginia where rail lines that follow rivers limit public access to the waterway for launching or retrieving boats. Often the public can cross rail lines at locations where a public crossing already exists. However, at times there is no reasonable alternative to crossing a the rail line in certain

locations or placing a trail alongside a rail line. This creates a rail crossing or rails with trails situation.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), DRPT, Norfolk Southern Corporation and CSX have been discussing a procedure for evaluating crossing proposals and determining whether they have merit. Liability issues still need to be addressed. The railroad companies have not committed to this proposal, but have agreed to work with the Commonwealth to determine whether or not their concerns can be adequately addressed. DRPT has commissioned a study of existing rails with trails in other states to identify ways in which liability, safety, and trespassing issues have been addressed. The findings of that study should include recommendations for next steps in Virginia.

Chapter IX-C. Local and Regional Parks and Open Spaces

Concern for the environment and access to parks and open space is not frivolous or peripheral, rather, it is central to the welfare of people body, mind, and spirit.

–LAURANCE ROCKEFELLER, US capitalist & philanthropist

Text Box

Top 10 Reasons Parks are Important

By Richard J. Dolesh, Monica Hobbs Vinluan and Michael Phillips,
National Recreation and Park Society

The following “top 10” list of park and recreation values is in no particular order; rather, it encompasses the range of why we collectively believe that public parks and recreation is an essential part of our national heritage:

1. Public parks provide millions of Americans with the opportunity to be physically active. Physical activity is an essential part of an individual’s efforts to stay healthy, fight obesity and prevent chronic conditions that lead to coronary disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. Having close-to-home access to places where one can recreate is one of the most important factors linking whether people will become active and stay that way.

2. Parks have true economic benefits. Proximity to a developed state, regional or community park improves property value. The economic benefits of park and recreation areas are manifold, but one of the most significant is the increase in value of private land adjacent or near protected public land. The proximity of parks to residential areas leads to increased value of private land, a higher tax base and ultimately many economic benefits to a community including increased local and regional revenue from heritage tourism, steady jobs, and numerous small business benefits. Park and recreation areas are economic engines that improve the quality of life and make communities livable and desirable for businesses and homeowners.

3. Parks provide vital green space in a fast-developing American landscape, and provide vegetative buffers to construction and development, thus reducing the effects of sprawl. More importantly, parks and public lands also provide groundwater recharge areas, floodplain protection, natural sound barriers, stormwater protection from wetlands, reductions in heat island effects, and carbon uptake from abundant trees and vegetation. Parks keep our living environment healthy.

4. Parks preserve critical wildlife habitat. As our nation develops and our rural, agricultural and forest landscape is being lost, open space and wildlife habitats are disappearing at an alarming rate. The connected network of local, regional, state and national parks across our country provide permanently protected wildlife habitat corridors for thousands of indigenous and migratory wildlife species. In addition,

stream valley parks and community parks allow natural wildlife to co-exist with people while providing enjoyment and educational opportunity for children and families.

5. Parks and recreation facilitate social interactions that are critical to maintaining community cohesion and pride. Parks provide a meeting place where community members can develop social ties, and where healthy behavior is modeled and admired. People gather to share experiences, socialize and to build community bonds in common green spaces. These public commons are often the glue that holds the community together and the means to maintaining and improving future positive social interactions.

6. Leisure activities in parks improve moods, reduce stress and enhance a sense of wellness. In an increasingly complex world, more and more people are placing a high value on achieving the feelings of relaxation and peacefulness that contact with nature, recreation and exposure to natural open spaces bring. People go to the park to get in a better mood, to reinvigorate themselves and to decrease the anxieties of daily life.

7. Recreational programs provide organized, structured, enjoyable activities for all ages. The diverse range of recreational programs offered by public park and recreation agencies offers all Americans the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to successfully and confidently engage in sports, dance, crafts and other social activities. Public recreation leagues and classes offer seniors, adults and children alike the opportunity to interact with coaches and teachers who often turn into mentors and role models. Quality recreational programs facilitate safety, good sportsmanship and community participation.

8. Community recreation services provide a refuge of safety for at-risk youth. Many parents are rightfully concerned with the dangers of unstructured "hanging-out" or unsupervised after-school activities. Community recreation programs at public park and recreation facilities provide children with a safe refuge and a place to play, which are important in reducing at-risk behavior such as drug use and gang involvement. Recreational programs led by trained leaders offer children healthy role models and give valuable life lessons to help steer youth to a future of promise and opportunity for success.

9. Therapeutic recreation is an outlet that individuals with disabilities have to be physically active, socially engaged and cognitively stimulated. A goal of all public recreation agencies is to provide access to all people. Public park and recreation agencies are the largest providers in America of high-quality, life-enhancing therapeutic recreation programs and interventions. Such programs prevent the on-set of secondary conditions due to inactivity; improve physical, social, emotional and cognitive functioning; and slow the onset of regressive conditions.

10. Public parks embody the American tradition of preserving public lands for the benefit and use of all. Since the creation of the first national park and the subsequent development and growth of state, regional and local park systems in virtually every part of our nation, Americans have had a special relationship with their parks and public

lands. A love of parks is one of the defining characteristics of our national identity. Americans love their parks, historical sites, national monuments, recreation areas and public open spaces because they bring such joy and pleasure to all people. In addition, the American public has shown time after time that they are willing to care for their parks, protect them, and pay for them.

End Text Box

Introduction

Local and regional parks and recreational facilities are the foundation of an effective outdoor recreation system for the Commonwealth. Citizens want recreational opportunities close to where they live. Although parks and recreation services are not a mandated service, providing close-to-home park and open space areas is generally considered a basic responsibility of local government. There is normally an opportunity for citizens to be involved in the process of providing these recreation services and park areas as volunteers or as members of a citizen board or commission.

The benefits of parks and recreation have been documented through various studies, including a national study conducted by Drs. Geoffrey Godbey and Alan Graefe. Their report, *The Benefits of Local Recreation & Parks Services: A Nationwide Study of the Perceptions of the American Public*, is available from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), (703) 820-4940. The major conclusions of this report are: recreation and park services are used by the vast majority of the public; use continues across the life-cycle; a community benefits from local recreation and park services; the majority of respondents believe that recreation and park services are worth as much or more than they are currently paying in taxes; and recreation and parks services provide benefits to users and non-users. This is in harmony with the findings of the 2006 *Virginia Outdoors Survey* in which nearly ADD FIGURE % of Virginians said outdoor recreational opportunities were important to them.

[Textbox begin

Findings

- There is a troubling trend in rural Virginia to disband local parks and recreation departments and instead provide public funding to private organizations to provide recreation services.
- In the Commonwealth of Virginia, parks and recreation is not a mandated service and no operational funding is provided to local governments to provide those services. The South Carolina Rural Recreation Project is a model program with the goal of aiding localities in the establishment of full or part-time parks and recreation departments in rural areas of South Carolina.
- In the Commonwealth of Virginia Auditor of Public Account's Comparative Report of Local Government Expenditures (year ended June 30, 2005) it was

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reported that \$728 million was spent by local governments on Parks, Recreation and Cultural activities in FY2005. This compares to \$691 million spent in FY2004 and \$432million spent in FY1996.

- In the Commonwealth of Virginia Auditor of Public Account's Comparative Report of Local Government Expenditures (year ended June 30, 2005) it was reported that cities spent \$76.45 per capita on parks and recreation, while counties spent \$43.75, towns spent \$85.51, and statewide spending \$55.31 per capita on parks and recreation for FY 2005.
- The National Recreation and Parks Association held a forum in 2006 and established a National Agenda for Urban Parks and Recreation in America that included: Promoting Health and Wellness; Stimulating Community and Economic Development; Protecting the Urban Environment; And Educating, Enriching, and Protecting America's Youth.
- Americans use city or local community parks more than any other outdoor recreational areas.
- Seventy-five percent of all people use local parks and recreational services, and more than 40% visit local parks more than 10 times per year.
- Recent studies have indicated that people want more parks and recreation areas near large cities with more facilities for both organized sports and for unstructured free-play.
- According to the 2006 *Virginia Outdoors Survey*, ADD NEW FIGURE % of Virginians consider outdoor recreation an important or very important aspect of family life. This emphasizes that there is a significant demand for recreation resources and programs in Virginia.
- Based on National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) standards, a locality should provide a minimum of 10 acres of parkland per 1,000 citizens. The acreage should be divided between neighborhood, community, district and regional parks.
- According to NRPA standards, neighborhood park ratios should be three acres of parkland per thousand citizens, and not more than 15 minutes or one to two miles walking distance of those it is intended to serve. Community parks are designed to serve two or more neighborhoods and generally provide facilities requiring more space than can be accommodated in a neighborhood park. The district park is the largest of the three parks at four acres per thousand citizens (minimum 50 acres) is the planning standard.
- Regional parks, for which several localities may share responsibility, are also important elements of an effective outdoor recreation system. With a

recommended service radius of 25 miles and a minimum size of 100 acres, regional parks are larger in scope.

- Local parks and recreation departments are in need of additional funding sources, and an interest in friends groups and park foundations is on the rise in Virginia.
- Each year, an estimated 200,000 children ages 14 and under are treated in hospital emergency rooms for playground related injuries. The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that 70% of injuries on public playground equipment resulted from falls, especially falls to the surface beneath the equipment.

Textbox end]

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Recommendations

- Because of the social, health, environmental and economic benefits, each locality in Virginia should establish or maintain a publicly funded parks and recreation department. The department should oversee recreation programs, as well as the acquisition of parks and open space and the development of trails, athletic courts and fields, picnic areas, water access points and other recreation facilities.
- The Commonwealth of Virginia should support and provide incentives for local governments to maintain a parks and recreation department.
- The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, in cooperation with the Virginia Recreation and Park Society, and Virginia universities, should partner to enhance recreation and park services in rural Virginia. Using the South Carolina Rural Recreation Project as a model, the Commonwealth of Virginia should encourage and assist rural localities in providing recreation services to its citizens and help them establish a parks and recreation department.
- Local government departments should do a better job of coordinating planning efforts as it relates to recreation, parks and open space. Preparing and adopting an open space and recreation plan is a key element of the local planning process. Planning for green infrastructure and recreational programs are important to overall quality of life in a community. These plans should be incorporated into the locality's comprehensive plan and be consistent with the *Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP)*.
- Localities should appoint a parks and recreation commission to provide citizen leadership with regard to parks and recreation issues and concerns. Commissions have been effective in many localities to enhance park areas and recreation programs. This is most important in localities where no parks and recreation department exists.

- Commitments to the maintenance, management, and development of local parks and recreational systems are necessary. Localities should explore alternative methods of funding, such as set-aside ordinances, fees and charges and public/private partnerships. The establishment of a “friends group,” which could possibly evolve into a “park foundation,” should be considered for the local parks and recreation department. This citizens group could be a source of volunteers, as well as a source for community support and other resources.
- Local parks and recreation departments should initiate a structured volunteer program that recruits, trains and retains volunteers, and recognizes their contributions to parks, programs and the overall quality of life in communities.
- All localities should develop and implement hiking and bicycling plans which connect parks, schools and neighborhoods. Encouraging biking and walking within the community can enhance community health and spirit.
- Parks and programs need to be accessible to special populations, including senior adults and persons with disabilities.
- Consideration by localities of the benefit of a school/park cooperative agreement could enhance use of school and park facilities. School systems and local parks and recreation departments should cooperate in the design of new or renovated facilities. In order to increase local access, localities should consider cooperative management for the recreational use of private, corporate, state or federally owned lands.
- All public playgrounds, including school and park playgrounds, should meet or exceed the guidelines established by the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission and published in the USCPSC Handbook for Public Playground Safety. All equipment should have a cushioned surface under and around it.

Textbox End]

Local Parks and Recreation Departments

Twenty-seven of the ninety-six Virginia counties do not have full time Parks and Recreation Departments, meaning they do not employ a full-time parks and recreation director. These counties include: Alleghany County, Brunswick County, Buchanan County, Charlotte County, Craig County, Cumberland County, Dickenson County, Greensville County, Highland County, King and Queen County, Lancaster County, Lunenburg County, Mathews County, Mecklenburg County, Northumberland County, Nottoway County, Powhatan County, Prince Edward County, Rappahannock County, Richmond County, Russell County, Smyth County, Southampton County, Sussex County, Washington County, Westmoreland County, and Wise County. (see Map)

Sixty-nine Virginia counties have full-time parks and recreation departments, as do 21 incorporated towns, and all cities, except Emporia. These departments serve a vast

majority of citizens across the state. The largest void in service is in the northern neck, south-side and southwestern regions of the state. While new parks and recreation departments are formed occasionally across the state, it is a troubling trend that localities are dropping their parks and recreation departments and turning their programs over to private organizations such as the YMCA. We have seen a substantial reduction in public parks and recreation departments since the last VOP was published. While private organizations may provide recreation programming in the short term, they are not charged with planning for the long term recreation, park and open space needs of a community.

Funding for Parks and Recreation

Spending on parks and recreation varies a great deal from locality to locality. It should be noted that many localities do provide some funding for parks and recreation, but may not have taken the step of establishing a full-time department. Some towns help fund larger county departments or may assist private groups or non-profits in providing specific programs. The Commonwealth of Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts provides information on parks and recreation spending by each locality in its Comparative Report of Local Government Revenues and Expenditures.

Recreation budgets, when compared to other local services, often are very limited. Park land acquisition and development often depends upon state and federal funding and private donations. Local parks and recreation departments are in need of alternative funding sources, and an interest in friends groups and park foundations is on the rise in Virginia. While a friends group is a less formal citizen group, a park foundation is a legal mechanism created by dedicated people to benefit the parks and recreation system. Citizens can form a foundation by creating a nonprofit corporation and applying for nonprofit status with the appropriate state office and the Internal Revenue Service. Park foundations are normally established due to: the need for alternative funding; rising costs of land acquisition; the public's developing sense of stewardship toward land and cultural resources; and the public's willingness to give to charitable causes. Park foundations in Virginia have raised money to build athletic fields, plant trees, purchase benches and other park amenities, provide scholarships to disadvantaged youth and to provide funding for special events

Location of Local and Regional Parks

Although specific local park sites are not identified in the *Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP)*, they are included in the Department of Conservation and Recreation's facility inventory. The *VOP* does identify several general areas of opportunity for localities to consider when planning the development of a park and recreation system. These areas include stream valleys, landfills, flood plains and abandoned railroad right-of-way corridors. Because development is usually restricted, stream valleys often are excellent opportunities for trail construction. Utility corridors and abandoned railroad right-of-ways also should be considered for trail development. These linear corridors provide opportunities for communities to work together to provide greenway parks. Greenways can enhance the resource base by linking cultural, historical, recreational and natural areas into a unified open space system.

Each locality should develop strategies to meet the parks, recreation and open space needs in their community. The National Recreation and Parks Association has guidelines for assessing the local resources and obtaining community input needed to establish a vibrant system of parks and open space.

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Standards for Providing Community Parks**

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) standards suggest a locality should provide a minimum of 10 acres of parkland per 1,000 citizens. Park acreage should be distributed into a system of neighborhood parks, community parks and district parks. These parks, developed to complement existing private and public facilities, make for an effective system of meeting local recreation demand.

Neighborhood parks should be provided at a ratio of three acres of parkland per thousand citizens, and not more than 15 minutes or one to two miles walking distance of those it is intended to serve. These parks may include playground equipment, game courts and play fields. Smaller parks may also best meet the needs of a specific population.

Community parks are designed to serve two or more neighborhoods and generally provide facilities requiring more space than can be accommodated in a neighborhood park. Facilities may include lighted game fields and court complexes, a swimming pool, a picnic area, and walking and jogging trails. Community parks should be within 15 minutes' drive of the client population.

District parks are larger parks designed with a ratio of four acres per thousand citizens or a minimum of 50 acres. And are located 15 to 20- minute drive from the target population. These parks should also be accessible by public transportation, pedestrians and bicyclists.

Regional parks are generally managed by several localities have a recommended service radius of 25 miles and a minimum size of 100 acres.

(Source: National Recreation and Parks Association)**Text box End]**

Planning for Parks and Open Space

Planning for a locality's green infrastructure and recreational programs is important to overall quality of life in a community. These open space and recreation plans should be incorporated into the overall comprehensive plans of localities. It is very important that the plan include a walking and bicycling trail component. Having an adopted bicycle/pedestrian trail plan is essential if VDOT is to include these components when improving or building roads.

Just as the *Virginia Outdoors Plan* looks to the future of parks and open space for the Commonwealth, each locality should develop its own blueprint for future park spaces and recreation programs. The process of developing a local parks, recreation and open space plan can serve to enlighten citizens to the need for proper planning, as well as to mobilize resources to enhance the quality of life in a community. With proper planning, a clear path can be established to developing a strong parks and recreation system to serve the public. A comprehensive parks and recreation system serves to enhance the quality of life of all the citizens in the community.

The best parks and recreation departments are those where the citizens feel a sense of ownership and are involved in the park system. Communicating the individual, community, economic and environmental benefits of a system of parks and recreation is critical to maintaining and building community support.

Citizen Involvement

Citizen involvement is a key component to the development of a comprehensive parks and recreation program for a community. Parks and recreation commissions may be established to serve in either an advisory or policy-making capacity. Commissions offer localities a unique resource to help determine the direction that parks and recreation should take in the future and provide the leadership necessary to achieve this vision. Board and commission members should be provided with orientation and ongoing training to support their board activity. Boards can provide the parks and recreation department with strong ties to the local business community, which can result in private funding of recreation programs and facilities and opportunities for beneficial partnerships.

Partnerships and Cooperative Agreements

Due to the heavy use of athletic facilities, it is vital that schools and parks develop cooperative agreements for the use of these public facilities. While many P & R departments already work cooperatively with school systems to provide community-level programs throughout the jurisdiction, more localities need to consider the implementation of the school/park concept. The school-park concept promotes the schools and surrounding land and facilities as community recreation centers during non-school hours. The concept requires close cooperation between school and recreation personnel throughout facility planning, development and renovation to ensure that a balance of recreational and educational features is provided. An operating agreement between the school board and the governing body should encourage full use of all available resources.

Park and recreation departments should initiate contact with agencies and organizations (i.e. colleges, universities, military bases, armories, churches etc.) to determine the feasibility of creating partnerships with the institutions to make recreational facilities and programs more accessible to local citizens. Further, local governments can and should enter into agreements to access or manage private facilities, where possible, for the public's use and enjoyment.

Park Safety and Accessibility

Individuals of varying abilities desire access to recreation programs and facilities. Attention must be given to assure that programs and facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities. By making programs accessible to persons with disabilities, access to programs improves for everyone.

Safety is an important consideration for managers of park and recreation facilities. Of particular concern is the safety of playground areas. The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM) provide guidelines on the design and installation of playground equipment. The National Recreation and Park Society conducts the National Playground Safety Institute, the Playground Safety Inspector Course and Exam. Individuals that take the course and pass the exam become Certified Playground Safety Inspectors (CPSI).

Pools also present particular safety challenges. Pool personnel must receive appropriate training in supervising participants, as well as lifesaving and first aid techniques. Staff must also be trained in the overall operation of the pool complex, including the handling of chemicals and recognizing potential health and safety hazards. The National Recreation and Park Association is one of the lead organizations in providing training to pool operators. The American Red Cross is recognized as a leader in training lifeguards and swimming instructors.

While the safety of facilities is important, it also important that staff and volunteers be trained to supervise and teach children. Coaches should be provided training on teaching athletic skills, as well as sportsmanship, first aid and safety. Appropriate sportsmanship standards should be set and enforced for coach, participant, parent and fan behavior. Staff and volunteers working with children should pass a criminal background check.

Health and Wellness Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

Parks provide places for people to play and programmed recreational activities that encourage physical activity. The lack of parks and recreation close to home, combined with hectic schedules, high-fat foods, automobile-oriented development, and expanding forms of electronic leisure, contributes to obesity which results in significant health-care cost. The increase in the diagnosis and treatment of some forms of mental illness is a parallel trend that may be related to the lack of time spent in outdoor play.

Perhaps more time spent indoors results in lowered tolerance for the risks associated with unstructured play outdoors and in nature. In trying to protect children from predators, disease and exposure, parents often discourage unstructured play outdoors. Without statistics, parents cannot compare these risks with the risks of chronic disease and lost opportunities for creative play that may result from too much time indoors. However, health experts believe the benefits of outdoor activity and exercise far outweigh the risks.

Pull Out Quote

People in our society today spend the majority of their time indoors, be it in an automobile, an office, a workplace, or home. Even if they use the parks as we wish they would, the amount of time out of doors is minuscule compared to the amount of time spent indoors. The benefits of outdoor activity and exercise FAR outweigh the risks.

Martha W. Moon, RN, PhD, MPH, VCU School of Nursing

End Pull Out Quote

The decision to invest in open space, outdoor recreation and public play space improves the physical, social and psychological well-being of all citizens. The table below summarizes how parks and nature contribute to human health.

Table 1. Parks Contribute to Health and Wellness

Health Component	Contribution of Parks
Physical	Provide a variety of settings and infrastructure for various levels of formal and informal sport and recreation for all skill levels and abilities (e.g. picnicking, walking, dog training, running, cycling, ball games, sailing, surfing, photography, birdwatching, rock climbing, camping).
Mental	Make nature available for restoration from mental fatigue, provide solitude and quiet; artistic inspiration and expression; educational development (e.g. natural and cultural history).
Spiritual	Preserve the natural environment for contemplation, reflection and inspiration; invoke a sense of place; facilitate feeling a connection to something beyond human concerns.
Social	Provide settings for people to enhance their social networks and personal relationships from couples and families, to social clubs and organizations of all sizes, from casual picnicking to events and festivals.
Environmental	Preserve ecosystems and biodiversity, provide clean air and water, maintain ecosystem function, and foster human involvement in the natural environment (Friends of Parks groups, etc.).

(A Summary of the Contribution of Parks to Human Health & Well-being
Parks Victoria, *From Healthy Parks Healthy People: The Health Benefits of Contact with Nature in a Park Context*, November 2002.)

[BeginText in box

Research shows that when people have access to parks, they exercise more. In a study published by the Center for Disease Control, creation of enhanced access to places for physical activity led to a 25.6 percent increase in the percentage of people exercising on three or more days per week. A group of studies reviewed in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine showed that “creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach” produced a 48.4 percent increase in frequency of physical activity. The same group of studies showed that access to a place

to exercise results in a 5.1 percent median increase in aerobic capacity, along with a reduction in body fat, weight loss, improvements in flexibility, and an increase in perceived energy. When people have nowhere to walk, they gain weight. Obesity is more likely in unwalkable neighborhoods, but goes down when measures of walkability go up: dense housing, well-connected streets, and mixed land uses reduce the probability that residents will be obese. (*The Benefits of Parks: Why America needs more City Parks and Open Space*, Trust for Public Land, 2006). End text box]

Positive Effects of Green Space on Health

The relationship between vegetative cover and air and water quality has been well established; many studies also demonstrate that attractive natural settings, landscapes, open space and forests contribute to mental health. Recognizing this relationship, health practitioners use horticultural therapy in community-based programs, geriatrics programs, prisons, developmental disabilities programs and special education. In *The Benefits of Parks: Why America needs more City Parks and Open Space* (2006), the Trust for Public Land showed that people report fewer health complaints and have better mental health in a greener environment (living near city parks, agricultural areas or forests). A 10 percent increase in nearby green space was found to decrease a person's health complaints in an amount equivalent to a five-year reduction in that person's age. A review of 10 years of medical records in a Pennsylvania hospital showed that patients with tree views had shorter hospitalizations, less need for painkillers, and fewer negative comments compared with patients with brick-wall views.

[Pull out quote

Those who do not find time for exercise will have to find time for illness. –OLD PROVERB

End pull out quote]

Table 2: Known Benefits of Contact with Nature in a Park Context

Viewing Nature	Key References
Improves concentration, remedies mental fatigue, improves psychological health (particularly emotional and cognitive aspects), and positively affects mood state.	(Kaplan, 1995; Rohde & Kendle, 1994; Ulrich et al., 1991b; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989)
Reduces stress and tension and improves self-reports of well being (positively influencing the immune system by reducing production of stress hormones such as cortisol and corticosterone)	(Leather et al., 1998; Lewis, 1996; Rohde & Kendle, 1994; Kaplan 1992a)
When exposed to scenes of natural environments subjects recover faster and are more resistant to	(Parson et al., 1998)

subsequent stress, which also is likely to boost immunity	
Recovery from a stressful event is faster and more complete when subjects are exposed to natural rather than urban scenes, and heart rate and muscle tension decreases (yet it increases when viewing urban scenes)	(Ulrich et al., 1991b)
Viewing nature improves performance in attention demanding tasks	(Tennessen & Cimprich, 1995)
Viewing nature aids recovery from mental fatigue (attention restoration) and encourages reflection by requiring involuntary attention	(Herzog et al., 1997; Kaplan, 1995; 1992b; Hartig et al., 1991; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989, Furnass, 1979)
Views of flowers and trees in the workplace reduce perceived job stress, improve job satisfaction, and reduce the incidence of reported illness and headaches of office workers	(Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989)
Trees nearby decrease levels of fear, incivilities, and violence amongst residents; decrease crime rates in public housing; and improve the life satisfaction of residents	(Kuo & Sullivan, 2001; Kuo, 2001)
Being in Nature	
Natural play settings reduce the severity of symptoms of children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and improve concentration	(Taylor et al., 2001)
Natural surroundings assist cognitive functioning in children	(Wells, 2000)
Wilderness areas provide spiritual inspiration or enable people to gain a fresh perspective on life	(Cumes, 1998; Cordell et al., 1998; Martin, 1996; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989)
Therapy in a wilderness setting heals emotional and psychological conditions and can aid those recovering from substance abuse and violence	(Russell et al., 1999; Crisp & O'Donnell, 1998; Crisp & Auger, 1998; Bennett et al., 1997; Byers, 1979)
Outward Bound and similar programs successfully use wilderness challenges to boost self-confidence and self-esteem	(Cumes, 1998; Furnass, 1979)

(Extracted from Some Known Benefits of Contact with Nature in a Park Context
Parks Victoria, *From Healthy Parks Healthy People: The Health Benefits of Contact with Nature in a Park Context*, November 2002.)

[Begin Text Box

As a group, women over age 65 are among the least physically active in the nation, contributing to increased risk of osteoporosis, arthritis, heart disease and other ailments.

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It appears, from a mounting body of evidence, that environmental factors like access to parks and trails might be associated with physical activity behavior. Walking and physical activity levels increased significantly when participants reported being able to walk to at least two destinations. Also, women who lived within walking distance of a biking or walking trail, walked significantly more than those who did not.

“The Relationship Between Convenience of Destinations and Walking Levels in Older Women,” W.C. King, J.S. Brach, S. Belle, R. Killingsworth, M. Fenton and A. M. Kriska, *American Journal of Health Promotion* , 18(1): 74-82, September/October 2003
End Text Box]

Outdoor Recreation Policy Related to Health and Wellness

At least 18 state legislatures across the country have recently considered bills designed to increase access to walking and bicycling, and many local governments are considering initiatives linking bicycling, walking, community design and health. The mental and physical health-care costs associated with the lack of physical activity and the loss of time spent outdoors have a negative fiscal impact on Virginia communities. The economic consequences of obesity call for policy interventions that promote physical activity and outdoor recreation. The VOP recommends establishing and/or maintaining publicly funded parks and recreation departments and providing financial support and incentives to local government for this purpose (see chapter VIII-C). Other policy initiatives should promote active living through appropriate community design, as well as target the increase of physical activity in schools.

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Resources for Getting Active

Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
Physical Activity for Everyone www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/index.htm
America on the Move
aom.americaonthemove.org/site/c.hiJRK0PFJpH/b.1310797/k.BF62/Home.htm

Choose to Move
www.s2mw.com/choosetomove/index.html

Get Kids in Action
www.getkidsinaction.org/

Active Living Network
www.activeliving.org/

Hearts N' Parks
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/heart/obesity/hrt_n_pk/hnp_resg.htm

Active Living by Design

www.activelivingbydesign.org

End Text Box]

Related resource agencies

American Red Cross

2025 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: (202) 303-4498

<http://www.redcross.org/services/hss/aquatics/>

National Park Service

1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240
(202) 208-4747 Fax (202) 219-0910

www.nps.gov

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)

22377 Belmont Bridge Road
Ashburn, VA 20148
(703) 858-0784 Fax (703) 858-0794

www.activeparks.org

NRPA Southeast Service Center

1285 Parker Road
Conyers, GA 30094
(770) 760-1668 Fax (770) 760-9427

www.activeparks.org

South Carolina Rural Recreation Project

Box 340735, 263 Lehotsky Hall
Clemson, SC 29634-0735
(864)656-2231

<http://www.hehd.clemson.edu/PRTM/ruralre.htm>

The Trust for Public Land

116 New Montgomery
4th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 495-4014

www.tpl.org

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)

Washington, D.C. 20207-0001

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(301) 504-0990
(800) 638-2772 (consumer hotline)
www.cpsc.gov

Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts
P.O. Box 1295
Richmond, VA 23218

Virginia Recreation and Park Society
6038 Cold Harbor Road
Mechanicsville, VA 23111
(804) 730-9447 Fax (804) 730-9455
www.vrps.com

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
203 Governor Street, Suite 326
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 786-2556 Fax (804) 371-7899
www.dcr.virginia.gov

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
4010 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23230
(804) 367-1000 Fax (804) 367-9147
www.dgif.virginia.gov

Virginia Department of Transportation
Bicycle and Pedestrian Program
1401 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219
(800) 835-1203
vabiking@vdot.virginia.gov
www.vdot.virginia.gov

The Conservation Fund
1800 North Kent Street, Suite 1120
Arlington, VA 22209-2156
(703) 525-6300
www.conservationfund.org

Chapter IX- E. The Private Sector

Americans spend more than \$400 billion annually on recreational goods and services. Recreation is a very important positive economic and social force in America today. Recreation is a part of all American lives – the old and the young, the fit and the disabled, the affluent and the poor. There is an amazing mosaic of for-profit and not-for profit organizations and government agencies, which are at work supporting recreation and protecting the shared legacy of America's public lands.

Dave Humphreys, Chairman of the American Recreation Coalition and President of the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association from Partners Outdoors 2006 Conference

The private sector plays a major role in the provision of recreation opportunities, as well as in the management and stewardship of the Commonwealth's open space and natural resources. Private sector involvement includes individual citizens, organizations, corporations and businesses. The *Virginia Outdoors Plan* supports private investment in recreational endeavors including the provision of quality recreational facilities and services as well as the promotion of conservation and land stewardship. Without a diversity of private sector partnerships, the level of service and properties available to the public for outdoor recreation and conservation initiatives would be limited.

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Findings

- Public use of private lands and waters for fishing, hunting, hiking and other recreational pursuits is an important component of supply to meet recreation demand. Traditionally private lands open for public recreation are declining due to ownership changes, property sizes being reduced, more restrictive access policies, insurance issues and landowner opposition (USFS 11/03).
- The public sector actively encourages private investment in recreation sites, facilities and services on public lands (USFS 11/03).
- Corporations, nonprofit groups, churches, individuals, and historic preservation organizations contribute significantly through land use agreements and partnerships to the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities and the preservation of open space and natural resources.
- There are opportunities to market Virginia grown products and agri-tourism alongside outdoor recreation.
- There is a change in land holdings of forestlands from large timber companies to others not involved in forest management. This could result in the long-term loss of the renewable resource, forest habitat, and lands open for traditional forest recreation.
- Increased public access to both public and private properties using exchanges, easements, acquisitions and partnerships will be necessary to meet the recreation demand in the future.
- Children and adults spend less time outdoors in nature, which negatively affects their health and well-being.

- Non-profits, churches and foundations with a mission other than outdoor recreation or conservation may use land as leverage or to turn a profit when the organization is financially stressed.

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Recommendations

- Recreational use agreements and/or easements should be encouraged for private property owners providing public recreation opportunities and to make more private lands available for recreation.
- Efforts should be made by DCR to make existing and potential private sector providers of outdoor recreation, especially where applicable to trails and greenways development, knowledgeable about the Virginia Landowner Liability Law.
- The private sector is encouraged to coordinate with state and local parks and recreation agencies to determine how to supplement outdoor recreation.
- Local, state and federal outdoor recreation providers should support corporate recognition programs and improve corporate recognition for small business willing to incorporate outdoor recreation needs in an environmentally friendly manner.
- Private sector health and outdoor recreation providers should partner to support further research and linkage of healthy lifestyles with outdoor recreation.
- Employers should identify ways to promote an active lifestyle both inside and outside the agencies.
- Develop with the assistance of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry, Virginia Farm Bureau, Local and State Chambers of Commerce the location of local farmers markets, craft centers, wineries, and home based industries so that travelers may have opportunities to purchase Virginia products.
- Encourage federal, state and local outdoor recreation providers to partner with multiple private sector organizations.

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Types of private recreation providers

Private recreation providers are important to all types of recreation. These providers help to meet the demand in communities across the Commonwealth for high quality, convenient recreation facilities. Active outdoor providers may include private facilities for all terrain vehicles, horseback riding, mountain biking, hang gliding, swimming, zip line courses, geocaching, rock climbing and canine training and tracking courses. Passive outdoor providers may include private hunting facilities, especially hunt clubs, hiking paths, fishing piers, picnicking, bird watching and nature photography. Private community centers such as the YMCA and community related organizations offer gyms, weightlifting and workout facilities, racquetball, tennis, bowling, swimming and fitness classes. Private commercial facilities may include indoor shooting ranges, paint ball ranges, putt put courses, amusement parks, exercise facilities, indoor swimming and skating rinks. Resorts and clubs including golf courses, skiing, snow boarding tennis and racquet sports also help meet recreational needs within specific sectors of the population.

Virginia Tourism promotes outdoor recreation

Virginia Tourism Corporation compiles both public and private outdoor recreation data related to tourism. Virginia's Outdoor Guide Search is a feature on the Virginia Tourism Corporation website that will assist citizens in planning an outdoor trips. The website will sort information by locality, region and types of recreation.

<http://www.virginia.org/site/main.asp?referrer=outdoors>

2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey

The 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey shows for outdoor recreation activities citizens use publicly owned facilities approximately 73 percent of time and private facilities the remaining 27 percent of time. Some outdoor facilities lend themselves to the use of private lands or commercially developed outdoor recreation facilities. Activities involving large land areas most often incorporate more frequent use of private lands. The 2006 survey indicated that horseback riding, hunting, snow skiing and snow boarding and driving motorcycles off-road all were more apt to use private lands for these activities. The following table summarizes for each outdoor activity surveyed the percentage of time involved in using private vs. public lands.

Activity	Percent Use of Public Lands	Percent Use of Private Lands	Unknown if lands are public or private
Horseback riding	26.2	69.3	4.5
Hunting	33.1	65.6	1.3
Snow skiing/snow boarding	41.8	55.4	2.8
Driving motorcycles off-road	41.1	48.4	10.4
Driving 4-wheel vehicles off-road	55.7	37.2	7
Tennis	64	33.7	2.3
Golf	63.2	32.5	4.3
Jet-ski/personal watercraft	64.8	31.4	3.8
Basketball	75.2	23.9	0.9
Football	73	23.4	3.6
Volleyball	73	23.4	3.6
Water skiing	71.9	23.3	4.8
Rafting	79.7	23.3	4.8
Sailing/sail boarding	73.7	21.7	4.6
Skateboarding	74.1	21.1	4.9
Tubing	74.4	20.2	5.5
Power boating	75.2	19.5	5.3
Inline skating	80.5	19.5	0
Visiting gardens/arboretums	75.6	18.2	6.2
Freshwater Fishing	79.7	16.9	3.4
Canoeing/kayaking/rowing	80.9	15.4	3.7
Sunbathing/relaxing on beach	82.9	14.7	2.4
Soccer	82.1	14	3.9
Nature study/program	85.8	12	2.2

Saltwater Fishing	86.5	11	2.5
Jogging	86.3	8.8	4.8
Walking	86.3	8.5	5.2
Baseball	88.4	8.2	3.3
Softball	87.9	8	4.1
Birdwatching (away from home)	82.7	6.9	10.4
Other bicycling	89.7	6.4	3.9
Camping	39.4	5.7	54.9
Playground	92	5.7	2.2
Picnicking	90.7	5.4	4
Off-road/mountain biking	94.6	4.7	0.7
Visiting natural areas, preserves or refuges	88.1	4.5	7.4
Fitness trail	93	4	2.8
Hike/backpack	91	3.6	5.4

Corporate support and partnerships

Corporate support and partnerships have grown over the past five to ten years. Many corporations are able to donate funds to outdoor recreation and conservation. In some cases it is advantageous for corporations to donate land or dedicate lands into conservation easements. There are a wealth of existing and potential partnerships for outdoor recreation, stewardship and conservation among corporations, non-profits and governmental agencies. Many corporations are well respected within their communities as excellent land stewards and protectors of the environment. Larger corporations are particularly sensitive to community outreach as well as incorporation of internal environmental programs like ISO 14000 (<http://www.iso14000-iso14001-environmental-management.com/>).

Traditionally, timber companies provided public access to recreation on their lands. Many of the large paper companies like WESTVACO, Bear Island, International Paper, Georgia Pacific, Grelf Brothers and others provide access to their properties for hiking, hunting and nature study. Partnership agreements have been made with state agencies like the Department of Conservation and Recreation for the use of their properties. The current trend for large timber companies to divest their land interests may affect the acreage of forestlands in Virginia. While many governmental agencies may be interested in purchasing these lands from the private sector, many acres are being sold to owners with land development interests. These landowners will not manage the forests as a renewable resource that in turn could jeopardize the longevity of Virginia's available for outdoor recreation and conservation.

In addition to outdoor recreation facility providers, a cooperative health and outdoor recreation initiative would be cost effective in meeting the needs for health and outdoor recreation. Such a partnership involving private, public and nonprofit organizations would further active living initiatives and over time help decrease rising health care costs. Linking outdoor recreation opportunities to health and wellness makes economic sense and would result in better quality of life for all citizens of the Commonwealth.

Many small businesses and for profit service providers also support outdoor recreation and athletic endeavors in communities across Virginia, the smaller businesses have been slower to become part of the green movement (Daily News Digest, Keith Girard, April 20, 2006).

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Opportunities to link leading sports and athletic community concerns with environmentally friendly practices and may further strengthen partnerships with small businesses.

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One such partnership developed with a small business using seed funds from a grant initiated by a local non-profit organization. This small business is spearheading an effort to implement a greenway adjacent to their property by becoming proactively involved negotiations with adjacent property owners and the county. The Richmond Outdoor Sports Experience (RISE) located in Chesterfield County provides indoor playing fields and lessons for soccer, volleyball and baseball. The over 2-acre RISE building sits in an industrial park adjacent to a stream. The project began in partnership with the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Chesterfield County and local non-profit organizations. The owners of RISE first designed and installed a BayScape landscape along with educational to serve as a trailhead to a greenway surrounding the site. Long-term plans in working with Chesterfield County and non-profit partners are to extend the greenway outside the RISE property boundaries along the stream linking the facility to a school and other recreational facilities. [\[Photo of RISE trailhead\]](#)

Textbox end]

Non-profit contributions

Non-profit organizations are often intimately familiar with the local community. Non-profits target needs within their area of interest and identify stakeholder groups. Non-profits involved in outdoor recreation, conservation and environmental stewardship often are the perfect liaison in forming partnerships with businesses and government. The role of non-profit often depends on its mission and goals. The advantages in working with non-profit organizations are the boards of directors who are generally well connected and interested in the community.

[Text box begin

There are over ____ non-profits operating in Virginia working on conservation, land management stewardship and environmental education. The types of projects led by non-profits may include:

Conservation easements

Land Donations

Greenways and trails additions

Land Management agreements

Implementation of low impact design alternatives

Promotion of land stewardship and conservation education

River cleanups

River corridor management

Scenic vista management

[Text box end\]](#)

Outdoor recreation facilities

Often the management and maintenance of locally owned recreation facilities are greatly enhanced through public-private partnerships. Athletic associations in many communities will adopt facilities and help maintain the property or raise funds to provide improved facilities. In addition locally initiated programs such as adopt-a-trail or statewide Adopt-A-Stream (<http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/sw/adopt.htm>) programs will improve the condition and long-term sustainability of outdoor recreation properties.

[\[Begin Text box for Case study](#)

The Evolution of Private Recreational Lands: Sandy Point State Forest

Approximately 2000-acres along the Mattaponi River in King William County has provided a myriad of recreational opportunities in the community. In the late 1940's, the property was purchased by the Chesapeake Corporation to manage as working forestland supporting Chesapeake's industrial needs. During that time, a small beach was leased to a private association providing river access. Beginning in the 1980's, recreational uses of the property expanded to include pen-raised game bird hunting. The Nature Conservancy purchased the property in the 1990's and continued to allow public access for various recreational uses including waterfowl hunting, upland game hunting and birdwatching. In 2002, the Virginia Department of Forestry supported financially by the Forest Legacy program and the U. S. Forest Service purchased the property. The Department of Forestry goals for the property that has become known as Sandy Point State Forest combined outdoor recreation with forest management practices. Over time, this property that had become increasingly important in meeting community needs for recreation. At any point in the history of land ownership for Sandy Point State Forest, the property could have been sold to one or more land developers and recreational access eliminated. It is more common for properties that have served as long-term recreational lands managed by private organizations to be sold for greater profit and becoming developed.

[\(include photo of site\)](#)

[End textbox\]](#)

Conservation

Nonprofit groups and individual activities contribute much to the total effort of preserving natural and historic resources. Among such groups are The Nature Conservancy, National Audubon Society, Izaak Walton League of America, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, service clubs and many others. Historic preservation organizations, such as the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, and the Civil War Trust also contribute significantly to the preservation of open space and natural resources that have public value and help to maintain the resources that define the character of the commonwealth. Unless easements are placed on these private lands for recreational and conservation uses, there is no guarantee that these facilities will be available for future generations. Often non-profits and foundations with a mission other than outdoor recreation or conservation will use land as leverage or to turn a profit when the organization is financially stressed.

[\[Begin textbox for case study](#)

Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation Conservation Area, Chesterfield County

The Brown and Williamson Tobacco Corporation, now RJR Tobacco worked with a local nonprofit organization, the Friends of Chesterfield's Riverfront to do land analysis of over 500 acres of property. The analysis determined the area of land most important for conservation along one-mile of the James River. Brown and Williamson Tobacco Corporation donated 262 acres of riverfront property to Chesterfield County and the county placed a conservation easement on the property.

[Photo & End Textbox\]](#)

Corporate Stewardship

Non-profit organizations and governmental agencies often partner to administer recognition programs for private sector businesses and to encourage corporate stewardship.

[\[Begin Text Box](#)

Corporate stewardship recognition programs

Virginia Coastal Program's Clean Marina Program

There are approximately 1000 marinas and 230,000 boaters in the tidal waters of Virginia that share in the scenic beauty, economic benefits and general use of Virginia's waterways. The Virginia Clean Marinas Program is a voluntary program funded and initiated by the Virginia CZM Program to help reduce non-point pollution.

<http://www.vims.edu/adv/vamarina/index.html>

Businesses for the Bay

Businesses for the Bay is a voluntary team of forward-looking businesses, industries, government facilities and other organizations within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The program is sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Program for businesses on the committed to implementing pollution prevention in our daily operations and reducing our releases of chemical contaminants and other wastes to the Chesapeake Bay. As members of *Businesses for the Bay*, we helped design this pollution prevention program.

<http://www.chesapeakebay.net/b4bay.htm>

Builders for the Bay

Builders for the Bay (BFB) is aimed at reducing environmental impacts from residential and commercial construction within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Under the leadership of the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, the Center for Watershed Protection and the National Association of Home Builders, Builders for the Bay encourages the voluntary adoption of better site design principles that reduce the environmental effects of residential and commercial development.

http://www.cwp.org/builders_for_bay.htm

Governor's Environmental Excellence Awards for Manufacturers

Virginia Manufacturer's Association sponsors the Governor's Environmental Excellence Awards for Manufacturers that are supported by Virginia's Governor, Secretary of Natural Resources, and Department of Environmental Quality. This awards program encourages Virginia's industries to develop new products that will enhance the state's pollution prevention policy and to help industry practice excellent environmental stewardship by recognizing outstanding efforts in this area each year.

http://www.vamanufacturers.com/geea/product_application.php

The Nature Conservancy's Safe Harbor Program

The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and Environmental Defense cooperatively developed Virginia's Safe Harbor program in 1995. In January 2001, International Paper became the first private landowner in Virginia to enroll in The Nature Conservancy's "Safe Harbor" program in Sussex County. Forest owners who voluntarily enroll in Safe Harbor agree, for a specified period, to restore or improve their land as woodpecker habitat. In exchange, they avoid future

regulatory restrictions on the use of their land should red-cockaded woodpeckers—protected under the Endangered Species Act—become established on their property.

<http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/virginia/press/press135.html>

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Community Support for Outdoor Recreation and Active Living

The entire community is needed to promote physical activity. According to *Shaping America's Youth*, more than 80 percent of organizations that fund childhood obesity-related programs are either non-profit or government, with for-profit businesses and corporations supporting less than 20 percent of ongoing programs.

Employers should promote active living through workplace-based programming. Workplace practices can play a key role in encouraging physical activity. Because an active workforce is an asset, workplace wellness is becoming increasingly important. Bon Secours Richmond Health System reports 81 percent of American businesses with over 50 employees have workplace health promotion programs. In the Second Tri-Annual Buffet Taylor National Wellness Survey, the top four reasons why Canadian companies offer worksite wellness programs is because healthy employees are a valuable asset (27.3%), to promote a healthy lifestyle (25.6%), to reduce absenteeism (14.3%) and to contain the costs of benefit programs (10.1%).

Some churches in Virginia provide trails and gyms as well as active recreation leagues for adults and children. These faith-based initiatives often integrate healthy living into congregational messages. For example, the Faith Cardiovascular Health Project launched programs in 49 ministries within five regions of Virginia to initiate walking trails, nutritional awareness, blood pressure checks and specific interventions designed to promote public health.

Individual property owners providing recreation

Private landowners will allow the public to use their lands and waters for fishing, hunting, hiking and other similar types of recreational pursuits. This has been confirmed by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' assistance to private landowners for the management of 12-15,000 acres of land for hunting, fishing and other wildlife recreation related activities. Also, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation in 1988 authorizing DCR to establish long-term contracts to develop privately owned recreational facilities on department lands. This legislation allows for increased public/private cooperation in the development of recreational opportunities in the commonwealth.

Agri-entertainment and Agri-tourism is a new, highly consumer-focused types of agriculture—may offer additional options for diversification and adding stability to farm incomes. Farmers have invented a wide variety of "entertainment farming" options. Farmers and foresters entertainment farming like picking vegetables, Christmas tree farming and navigating corn mazes have become popular recreation destinations. Also the significance of sustainable farms and local agricultural providers represented most frequently at farmer's markets highlights the benefits of farming from an ecological and economic perspective. Furthermore, the benefits of farms, agriculture and forests to scenic character and tourism must not be understated (See Chapter II-C: Scenic Resources). These local agricultural industries are also important for Virginia's local food security, encouraging linkages with local community markets and distributors and enhancing the sustainability of local food systems and connecting Virginia's farmers and Virginia farm products with Virginia's communities through recreation.

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Garden Tours and Garden Club Week provides an outlet for recreation and increase awareness for protection of sites, as do horticultural events and visiting botanical gardens and even nurseries. Many nurseries provide the recreation horticulturist and gardener classes and seminars to further understanding and enjoyment of their gardening experiences.

Community gardens and urban agricultural sites - The American Community Gardening Association (ACGA) is a bi-national nonprofit membership organization of professionals, volunteers and supporters of community greening in urban and rural communities. The Association recognizes that community gardening improves the quality of life for people by providing a catalyst for neighborhood and community development, stimulating social interaction, encouraging self-reliance, beautifying neighborhoods, producing nutritious food, reducing family food budgets, conserving resources and creating opportunities for recreation, exercise, therapy and education. Community gardens also if properly sited improve water quality by absorbing and recycling rainwater.

There is a sense of growing reticence for property owners to allow recreation on private lands. High rates of insurance create a problem for some activities such as equestrian concessions. Even though Virginia has an excellent land use liability law to protect private landowners who offer public access for recreation (see page ____), landowners wishing to offer pay for recreation services must protect their liability by obtaining appropriate insurance coverage.

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Selected Resources:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/pl/rpa/rec89.htm>

An Analysis of the Outdoor Recreation and Wilderness Situation in the United States: 1989-2040. November 6, 2003

<http://preview.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem>

National Governors Association Policy Paper: NR-14. Recreation Resources Policy.
July 20, 2005

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/entertainment.html>

National Sustainable Agriculture Information System

<http://www.communitygarden.org/>

American Community Garden Association

http://www.allbusiness.com/?dailyn=4_20_2006

Daily News Digest, Keith Girard, April 20, 2006

<http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/fote/>

US Forest Service – Forests on the Edge

<http://www.toad.net/%7Ecassandra/cheshome.htm>

Chesapeake Congregations

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